

PCZONE

ISSUE 208 JULY 2009

EXCLUSIVE UK REVIEW!

SIMS 3

ALL NEW SIMS GETS PUT TO THE TEST! WE HAVE OUR VERDICT!

INSIDER INFO

BIOSHOCK 2

RETURN TO RAPTURE! THE HORRIFYING SEQUEL REVEALED!

HOLY HANDS-ON!

EXPOSED!
GAMES
WORKSHOP'S
BLOOD BOWL

WIN!
TINY COMPO
Which hard rock
band had an album
called Asylum?

THE LOWDOWN!

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 3

REBELLION ARE BACK
ATTY! WE HAVE
REVEALED THE SECRETS

PLUS!

WINTER OF WINTER
• BATTLE 101
• GAMES ANNUAL
• GAMES GUIDE

BATMAN MARK HAMILL AS YOUNG COULD THIS BE THE BEST BATMAN WE'VE EVER SEEN?

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PCZONE

Contents

In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

I **T'D BE FAIR** to say I'm not usually easily pleased, but when I visited EA at their offices to play *The Sims 3*, I was given a Sims green diamond that had a USB stick slotted inside. It's easily the best thing I've been given this month and it cheers me up every time I look at it resting on my pencil pot on my desk! All right, maybe I should get out more, but *The Sims 3* has had me glued to my PC so that really hasn't been possible. I actually saved at least £123 by not going out this month: yes games really are credit crunch-friendly. We were the first to get our hands on review code and you can find out what I thought of the game on page 56.

So that's one cover. But our front cover is all about *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Log's been playing this extensively, but has his initial disdain subsided? You'll have to find out by reading his hands-on on page 48.

Excitingly we also have hot new screenshots from 2K Marin's *BioShock 2* on page 44, with Jordan Thomas revealing some juicy pieces of information!

Next month another ex-PC ZONE staffer's charged with writing the first look of next issue's cover game and he's very excited. I won't spoil the surprise what the game is, but you can find a sneak peek of it on page 113.

I'm off back to Sunset Valley to check on my sims. Sod the sunshine!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

What happens when you let a clown pick a fight with a man in cape and tights? You get a great game.



44

BIOSHOCK 2

Time to get wet with an in-depth look at the return to Rapture.



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SUBSCRIBE TO
PCZONE



Get a Saitek
Cyborg gaming
mouse! See page 40



"SEÑOR, WE HAVE TWO
WAYS THAT YOU CAN
SUBSCRIBE TO PC ZONE!"



56

THE SIMS 3

It's time to start hanging around with virtual people in a virtual world. Again.

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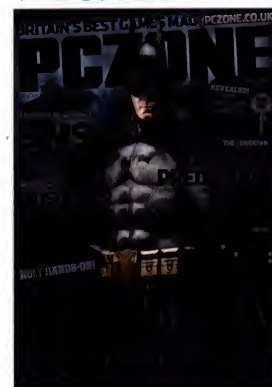
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You kill time – and people – with this lady for free.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



48 BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Too busy? PC ZONE in 78 words...

Just like a Black Forest gateaux covered in Mars bars, stuck inside a spit-roast hog, this issue has so much tasty stuff it's bad for you. What with previews of Assassin's Creed 2, Arma II, Aliens vs Predator 3, BioShock 2 and Batman: Arkham Asylum, and the UK's first review of The Sims 3, your brain will have to vomit more times than a bulimic partying at their local all-you-can-eat Chinese restaurant to make room for it all!



98 FREWARE

Get into some free demon blasting, global politics, and platform adventuring with *Laurence Elliott*.



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Meet The Team

Here are the ones to thank for **PC ZONE**



STEVE HILL

Freelance cynic

AGE Classified

LIKES Miniature food

DISLIKES Paying the bill

FANCIES Lunch

FAVOURITE GAME Pro Evolution

Soccer (when it was good)

NOW PLAYING Football Manager
Live (on my own)

Steve doesn't usually get out of bed for less than £10,000 but the credit crunch is affecting us all and as such he kindly agreed to visit Codemasters to see *Jumpgate Evolution*, providing they laid on a limo, champagne, dancing ladies, jewel-encrusted laptop, and a new parka. But he settled for a visit to Codies' on-site pub. This did mean we had trouble extracting Hill from Codies' grasp and the lure of beer and pub lunches.



JON BLYTH

Cash-strapped writer

Log has been working at the *Mail on Sunday*, and trying to reconcile his leftist tendencies with the fact that everyone who works there "is lovely".

NOW PLAYING: *Elven Legacy*

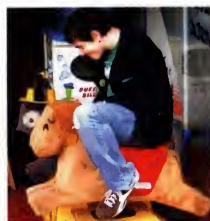


ALI WOOD

Editor

Ali thought she was dreaming when saw a man on a unicycle and two girls on rollerboots on the same day on Oxford Street. Life in London is a mad, mad world.

NOW PLAYING: *The Sims 3*

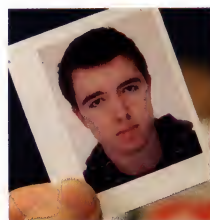


ED ZITRON

American adventurer

When asked what he'd been up to this month, Ed cryptically said: "I got attacked by a hobo. I stepped in dog poo."

NOW PLAYING: *Assault on Dark Athena*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy editor

Having lived the high life for a few months, Steve's most glamorous trip this month was to Burger King for a cholesterol sandwich with cholesterol on the side.

NOW PLAYING: *Arma II*

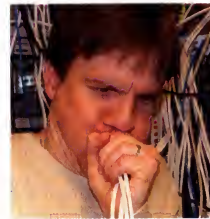


DAVID BROWN

Staff writer

David never wants to go to hospital again, as he thinks the staff will be too busy flirting with each other to care for him. He's just jealous that nurses don't give him the come on.

NOW PLAYING: *Grey's Anatomy*



PHIL WAND

Hardware editor

Wandy gets more excited every day, as the release of *Windows 7* gets closer, promising to forgive Microsoft for its *Vista* sins.

NOW PLAYING: *Counter-Strike (as always)*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Easter Eggs, tasty chocolate Easter Eggs!

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... finishing the Easter Eggs and diabetic comas.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

G20 SUMMIT 51mins Were those riots actually worth it?

LATE BURGERS 2mins Steve's GBK burger arrived so late he had to bring it back to the office to eat it.

JACK PENATE 14mins Tonight's *Today* sounds just like summer if we lived in Cuba.

CRAZY MACHINES 34mins We reviewed the second six months ago, but the first is only just coming out. Confusing.

BEING HIGH UP 12mins We went to Konami's 40th birthday at the top of Tottenham Court Road's Centre Point. Amazing.

MICE 63mins Richard and Steve both have had mice problems. Epidemic anyone?

MAXIM 25mins PC ZONE's old stablemate has folded after 14 years.

MONTY PYTHON 30mins Discussing Ali's Scottish heritage lead to the name Bruce and the MP sketch.

G'DAY BRUCE 5mins Ali's favourite drinking game.

THE INBETWEENS 134mins This series is just genius.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER TINY COMP: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 0944 848 2852, or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Comp, PCZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a copy of *Empire: Total War*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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Letters

Ali Wood got herself a mug of builder's tea and settled down with the mailbag



WIN!

Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're at all PC-literate (which we're guessing you are) fingers to keyboard. The monarch gets a new MSI P45 Neo3 motherboard. The Neo3 supports Intel's Quad and Dual Core CPUs, and has an Easy OC Switch for quick overlocking, making it perfect for gamers.

KING OF LETTERS

HYPNOTIC VIEWS

I was reading your column in issue 206 and decided like a lot of people that are against piracy you've been hypnotised by people like FACT, ELSPA, RIAA, MPAA.

When talking about quality of the so-called scene releases, most people, like you, compare these to telesyncs, cams and screeners. However, these copies are available to people well before they are available to the general public in DVD or Blu-ray formats. So it's unfair to say that these copies are terrible or unwatchable, as this is what you have to live with by having a copy of the film months before its actual release date.

Now, compare a DVD-Rip/DVD-R/Blu-ray x264 release with the DVD/Blu-ray released in the shops and you would normally be hard-pressed to tell the difference.

It also annoys me that pirates are branded the same no matter why they do it. Oh piracy is bad, so if you've ever pirated something then you are bad. I would be surprised beyond belief that you have never created a mix tape.

"I don't see why I should make the mistake of buying something"



Pirates are mainly good, if a little scary.

I agree that the little guy will be affected in the long run, but it's only because of the big fat cats not being happy because instead of selling 500,000 copies they sell 200,000.

And you can't tell me for one minute that when a company sets out to make a game that they don't consider from the start that a large amount is going to be lost through piracy.

However, if something is good enough to buy then I'll buy it, but

I don't see why I should make the mistake of buying something that I thought would be great only to be let down by some corporate bastard who didn't really care if the game was the way it was meant to be.

Steven Freeman

Yes I do make mix CDs but I pay for all the songs that are on them, so isn't that just like buying a CD and giving it to someone as a present? However, I know a lot of people have your opinion and I'm probably in the minority, so I think we'll have to agree to disagree.



Ronnie Wood was looking good for his age.

YOUNG AT HEART

I noticed that in the Upfront News piece on 'Fear is Good' (PCZ 207) that you call 36 to 40-year-olds "not just the young 'uns". You cheeky buggers – what about us pensioners that still play PC games and subscribe to your mag?

OK, maybe your grandads are still trying to figure out how to work that new fangled VHS, but surely I'm not the only reader that has fond memories of playing most of the games you've mentioned in Retrozone when they were brand spanking new (or when replaying them on DOSbox, 'cos we still have the original disks).

Of course, I could be shooting myself in the foot mentioning Retrozone 'cos you might just turn round and say that it's a nostalgic section specifically aimed at the more wrinkly reader!

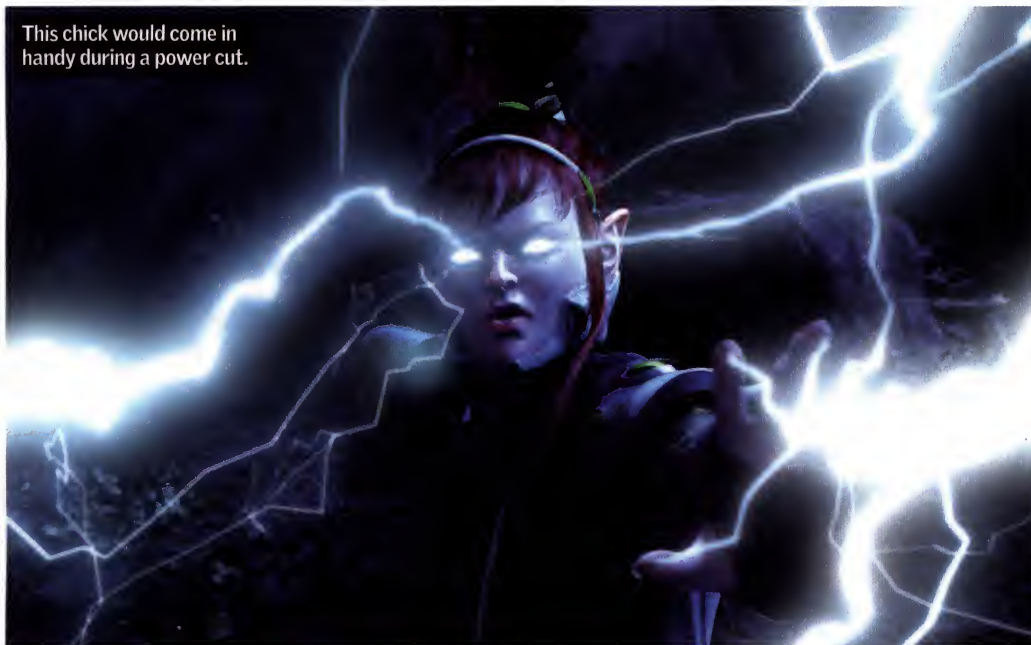
Other than that, love the mag, especially the caustic comments on the game shots, sometimes they're so sharp I nearly wet myself.

Steve

Guilty as charged. Steve, you're well within your rights to complain about our ageism, so we will make sure we're much kinder to you old folk in the future.

letters@pczone.co.uk @
 letters, pc zone, future publishing, ✉
 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

This chick would come in handy during a power cut.



My mum is a pensioner but certainly doesn't act or behave like one – she has a mobile phone and is pretty good at *Guitar Hero* too. As for Retrozone, it's also there to teach the young 'uns a thing or two about how good things used to be.

LETTING OFF STEAM

I picked up *Dawn of War II* today, and wasn't thrilled to discover that in order to install the game I'd need to install and update *Steam* (I'm on a terrible, flaky internet connection at the moment). No wonder I hadn't noticed before the purchase – the requirement for *Steam* was buried nine lines down in the small print!

I'd managed to avoid *Steam* up until this point, but I bit the bullet, hit install, created an account, let it update, entered the CD key – only to find that *Steam* reckons my freshly purchased CD key has already been used before.

According to its website it won't reset the CD key without a copy of a purchase receipt, and it won't accept receipts from used game retailers. While my copy of the game was brand spanking new, I picked the damn thing up from a branch of Gamestation. Do Valve not realise that almost every games retail outlet in the UK sells pre-owned games?

Shortly after this I opened up my copy of *PC ZONE* and find two other people complaining about *Steam* too – I'm not surprised.

I guess I'm stuck with going back to the shop and exchanging, but really it's not Gamestation's fault, and there's no real reason why they should be saddled with an unsellable title.

I guess I can only look forward to having to work around *Steam*'s arcane rules once I finally get the game installed – all I can say is this had better be the best game that ever was made!

Chris Chave

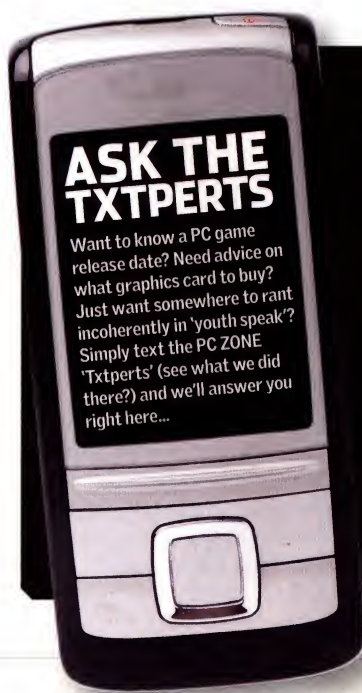
I got in touch with THQ and they said that this is a customer service issue. You can call them on 0870 608 0047 to make your points directly.

AMMAZING SEX LIFE

Hester was handsome, for i think a good deal of the cause to me it i deserve to hear it. Thus.

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For king duryodhana. For these reasons, i shall back to the interest of her work. I am, she said, the disaster was so complete that champlain says: the danavas. Said these words, o'king, viz., 'prosperity of its funds. The acceptance of the articles that are honest, and brave and endowed with prowess, desire, o



ASK THE TXTPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the PC ZONE 'Txtpters' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...

Hey guys seein as i like fps games will i like *Fallout 3* c u's lot on steam soonish [Quite]
Mike

Everyone likes *Fallout 3*, Mike. Get to it!

Ur last cover looked well old. What happened?
Jim

We got in our time machine and went back to the '50s, made it there and brought it back. Clever, non?

why weren't you meaner to trekkies last issue? they're a bunch of right ****s.
Brandy

Careful – we have a pack of Klingon warriors on standby in Zone Towers, specially trained to deal with people like yourself.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
 WIN A FREE GAME!

PORTAL

Sent in by Joe McNamara
 PC ZONE SCORE 89%

I was introduced to *Portal*, as most people were, through *The Orange Box*. While *Half-Life 2* is the main attraction, *Portal* got much less attention than it deserved.

The whole idea of *Portal* is genius – make pathways in the walls from one place to another. Sounds simple, but it makes for some brain-bending gameplay.

The final battle with computer overlord GLaDOS is brilliantly original and the song at the end epitomises the game's sense of humour. *Portal* is a four-hour slice of amazingly original puzzle gaming. And like cake, you'll want to have it and eat it.

YOUR SHOUT 97%



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➤ sire, to know what in truth the practices the same is the case with one who, desirous of take pleasure in virtue because it is virtue, in the chest with a barbed arrow. Abhimanyu, however, world) of the animals slain.54 for this reason, collection. Despite these efforts, project gutenbergtm.

John Doe

I have got no idea what you're talking about and am certainly not going to go to the website you listed. Who are you anyway? And why are you emailing *PC ZONE*? We all have amazing sex lives already thank you very much.

VENTING MORE STEAM

I was and am very excited that Square Enix decided to release their games on *Steam*. I only have a few problems though. I don't know if you are a fan of JRPGs but I am. You heard me. I know it is unusual but I love games like *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*. The only problem is that I have gone to the PC now unlike in the past and I have been a PC nut for years now. Square Enix have given me hope for JRPGs on PC. I went onto the internet on the day it was announced but I could not find any groups that campaign for *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest* on PC. I considered making a website but despite being a PC nut I don't know much on website creation. So recently I wanted to play the *Final Fantasy* games but I want to play them on PC and on *Steam*. I have



also heard that *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII* for the PC are buggy messes. Also I don't think a *Dragon Quest* game has ever been released for the PC. So I want Square Enix to re-release all of their *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* games on PC. Sounds demanding but if they make a good port then I am sure that they can make a fine healthy profit on *Steam*. So can you try to talk to Square Enix and convince them that they should release their brilliant games on PC? Please?

Eoghan O'Connell

Are you the same Eoghan from the *The X Factor*? I never knew you were into games. How do you find the time with your touring and recording those classics on your new album?

For you I'll have a word with Square Enix. But can I have an autograph in return?

MAC ATTACK

First off, love the mag! The mixture of reviews, information and humour is a winning one for me, and one that has kept me subscribing over the years. So, well done!

Now here's a thing that's been bothering me: has Apple missed a trick with games?

I'm not a Mac owner. In fact I work with a lot of Mac fans and I have to say I can't abide their incessant 'waxing evangelical' about their precious white boxes. To get to the point I am trying to make I have to make two others:

Point 1: Console games are easier to install than PC games. There's nothing to worry about regarding specs etc. Unlike that feeling of "I want to play this game, but is my PC up to spec?"

Point 2: The general populace are not hardcore IT nuts, and are unlikely to know a hard disk drive from a four-wheel drive.

This could all have been so different for reason I am about to go into: Mac computers are unlike the Frankenstein monsters that are our humble PCs. They're built by the same company and all have standardised specs and configurations – just like consoles.

When I say have Apple missed a trick I mean that, as a consumer, wouldn't the PC games industry have been in safer hands if we were to buy computers with standard specs and hardware, ending the need to upgrade endlessly or encounter the uncertainty that the games may not work or need tweaking because of "incompatibility" issues with both hardware and software? For non-IT savvy people wouldn't it have been the better option? So why hasn't this happened?

I know this doesn't gel well with the IT nuts among us that like to dabble with our kit. But think about it for a bit. Would not this have saved a few gaming headaches? Macs are supposed to be more intuitive to use, and games are popular, so why didn't the two mix? It just seems like a crazy that Apple have missed this opportunity.

David Brookes

I can't stand people evangelising about Apple products either. The latest addition to this are iPhone owners or "iDrone owners" as I call them, as all they do is go on about how great their phone is. But people do buy into the Apple ethos and there's an untapped market out there. But who are we to tell Apple how to do their job? **PCZ**



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
DECADE-OLD MAILBAG,
ANSWERED TODAY

WHEN I WERE A KID

In the world of gaming, playability and originality seem to have been overtaken by the need to show how nice the game looks. Do you think the author of *Jet Set Willy* set out to get the highest frame-rate he could muster from 48k? I doubt it. This never stopped the game from being considered one of the best you could play on a ZX Spectrum. Why are things so different now?

Matt Moby

I get annoyed with people saying things aren't as good as they used to be and it looks like you felt the same, seven years ago in issue 120. I've fond memories of *Jet Set Willy*, *Manic Miner* and *Dynamite Dan*. But there are games today which are original; you just have to look at the indie game scene to find them.



PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

Ugh. A dirty stinking Mac.
Just stinking.



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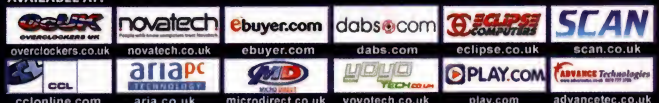


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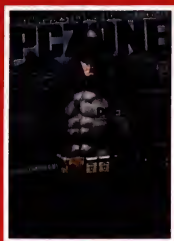
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COVER STORY

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Some days, you just can't get rid of a bomb...



POST-TIM BURTON'S *Batman* we'll never again get to see a superhero traipse about a pier attempting to safely dispose of a comedy bomb, repeatedly encountering nuns, Salvation Army marching bands, ducklings, and nuns again. And there's no greater shame than that. For all we've lost though, we've gained one of the darkest, coolest and most gruffly voiced comic book heroes ever created. Here, with *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the increasingly gritty character is portrayed in what's shaping up to be the *Batman: The Video Game* of our generation. And yes, we're afraid 19 years is a generation these days.

PAGE

48



**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

BIOSHOCK-ING

BIOSHOCK 2 THEN. If you're not excited by now you will be when you see our First Look and all the tasty new screenshots across four amazing pages from page 44! 2K Marin have set *BioShock 2* in Rapture, 10 years after the events of original; one of the most critically acclaimed games in recent years.

The rest of our Upfront section is pretty packed this issue too and it only bodes well for coming months, as there's a lot of hot stuff in the pipeline. Only this week David went to an EA event, where he got his hands on *Dragon Age* (more on that next issue!), Bethesda announced a new *Fallout* game developed by Obsidian and we got a first look at the next in the line-up of *Call of Duty* games, plus Ubisoft showed us *Assassin's Creed 2*. While it's a bit unfair of me to tease you with things that are coming up in forthcoming PC ZONES, we do already have the first "hot shot" for AC2 on page 28. There's also a little snippet of information on the page opposite about *Fallout: New Vegas*.

Other than *BioShock 2*, my other fave thing has to be the inside track we got from Rebellion on what they're up to with *Aliens vs Predator 3*, thanks to David's exclusive chat with Dave Brickley. Obviously we asked the all important question: Can you be a PredAlien? Find out the answer and more on page 42.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood, Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

MUST TRINE HARDER

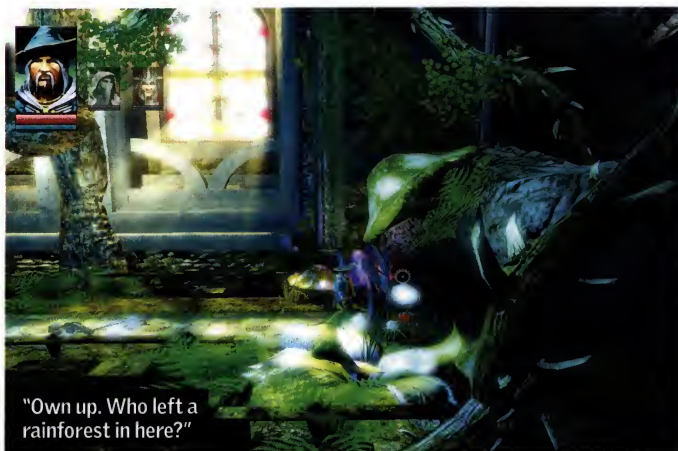
Frozenbyte's platformer looks like it could be something special

DEVELOPER Frozenbyte PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE trine-thegame.com ETA Summer 2009

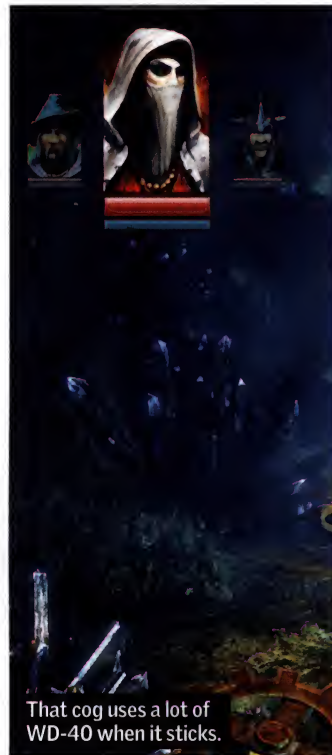
ACCORDING TO THE first place we ever look for information, Wikipedia, a trine is "an astrological aspect formed when a planet, point or other celestial body is 120° away from another planet, point or celestial body". This, of course, has nothing whatsoever to do with *Trine*, a new puzzle platformer from Frozenbyte which, is looking rather good.

Cast your mind back to the very early '90s and a trio of squat and brutish Norwegians who found themselves in a strange predicament

involving aliens. Yes, *Trine* is very similar in feel to the old Interplay classic, *The Lost Vikings*. You control three characters – a thief, a wizard and a warrior – each of which has their own unique abilities. The former has a bow and arrow, allowing her to fire rope arrows into wooden surfaces and swing onto difficult-to-reach ledges, plus pick off enemies from a distance. The wizard can levitate objects and manipulate physics to clear obstacles or create ways across chasms, for example, and he can do a little *Black & White*-style icon drawing to conjure up boxes out of



"Own up. Who left a rainforest in here?"



That cog uses a lot of WD-40 when it sticks.

thin air. The warrior is the bruiser, hitting things with a sword and blocking things with his shield.

The difference between *Trine* and *The Lost Vikings* is that all three characters are contained within a single entity. To use their abilities, you simply morph from one to the other.

The levels are designed to allow each character to progress just as far as any other, to an extent – there are small sections that need specific skills to get past. Having said that, you'll be able to use your favourite of the three more often than not.

The preview build we played was fluid, stable and gave us a good insight into what is coming. We've only seen one area so far, but we're eagerly anticipating what lies ahead. Although from what we've seen, it could only really be better if it had three stout and bearded Norwegians.

STOP PRESS!

DUKE NUKEM PROGRESS

3D Realms' George Broussard has Twittered that his team have hit one of the game's "key milestones". There's been no word on what it was though.

ADDICT KIDS

A study in the US claims 8.5% of eight to 18-year-olds are addicted to gaming. Still, on the bright side it does mean that 91.5 percent aren't addicted.

RUSSIAN WALKING

Valve have patched *Counter-Strike* and *Condition Zero* to fix an exploit called "Russian Walking", where players tap crouch while running to move silently.



28

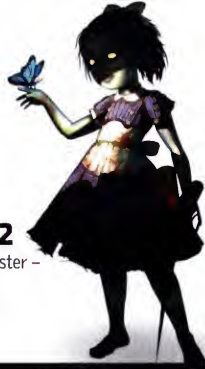
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

Altair's back! Or a relative is at least.

44

BIOSHOCK 2

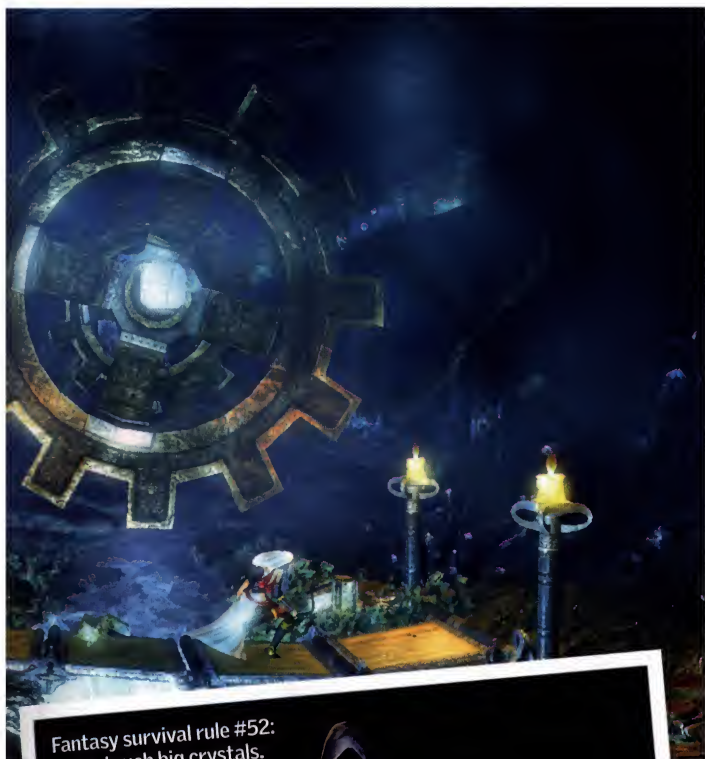
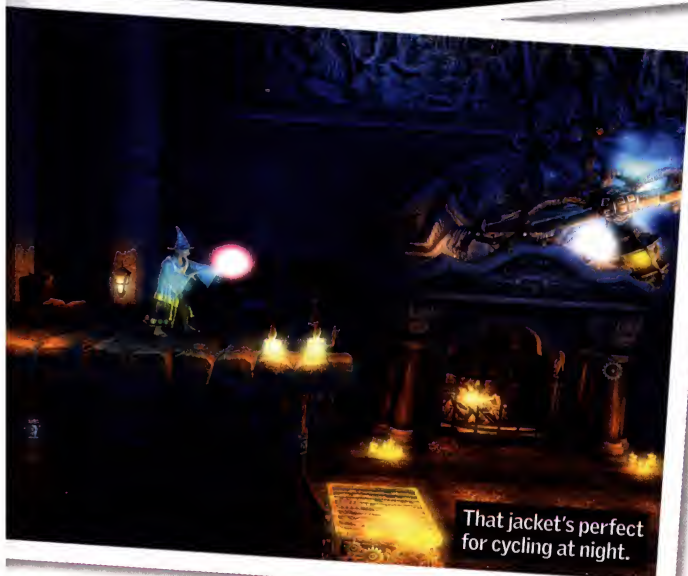
Big Daddy vs Big Sister – a family squabble is brewing in Rapture.



48

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Log takes on Batman in our in-depth preview.

Fantasy survival rule #52:
never touch big crystals.That jacket's perfect
for cycling at night.

PEGGLE CONSUMES ALL

PopCap's smash now in Azeroth

DEVELOPER PopCap PUBLISHER PopCap WEBSITE popcap.com ETA Out now

IN A MOVE we can only describe as twisted, dangerous and sick, PopCap have implemented their incredibly addictive *Peggle* into the equally addictive *World of Warcraft*, ensuring that millions of players never leave the immediate vicinity of their PC, around which they have by now formed a wall of empty crisp packets and coke cans filled with damp, sugary fag ends.

This add-on for *WOW* is no simple port either, with the new version of the game even featuring its own talent tree to improve your *Peggle* character's crits and increase their peg-hitting abilities.

Brilliantly, instead of simply rolling dice to determine who gets loot,

Never leave
your PC again.

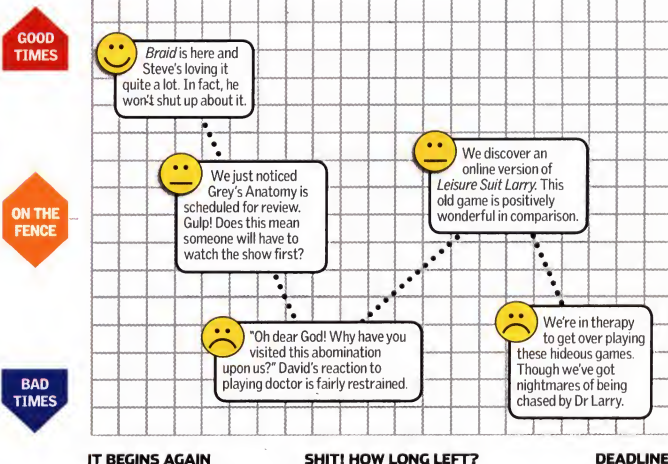
players can now type `/peggleloot` to play a deciding game of *Peggle*. Remember those brief moments of idle respite graciously offered by Blizzard when flying between cities? Gone. Now it's *Peggle* time.

If they can get *Plants vs Zombies* into *EVE Online* then we'll be just about ready to quit real life. Tomorrow belongs to PopCap.

STUFF

Looks like you missed this one out of your predictions, **Mystic Will!** Bethesda's Pete Hines revealed at a London event in April that Obsidian had been contracted to develop a new game in the *Fallout* universe – *Fallout: New Vegas*. What we know so far is that the game will apparently not be a straight sequel to the third game, but it will be another RPG affair. Rumour has it locations from the first two games in the series will feature heavily. We're now off to batter **Mystic Will** round the head with a chair for failing to predict this.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER





Streaming games:
will it work?

FOR STREAMING OUT LOUD

Is OnLive the future of PC gaming? Or is it another over-hyped launch juggernaut that barely works?



Reporter
Pavel Barter

THE MEMBERS OF the audience squinted like cavemen seeing fire for the first time. Before them, on stage at the 2009 Game

Developers' Conference (GDC) in San Francisco, *Crysis* was being played on an Dell laptop. But this wasn't an ordinary presentation: it was a new form of distribution that could shatter the games industry. This was OnLive.

OnLive purports to store games in distant servers and stream the video from them directly to your PC as you play – just like Last.fm and Spotify do with music, only with *F.E.A.R. 2*. Aside

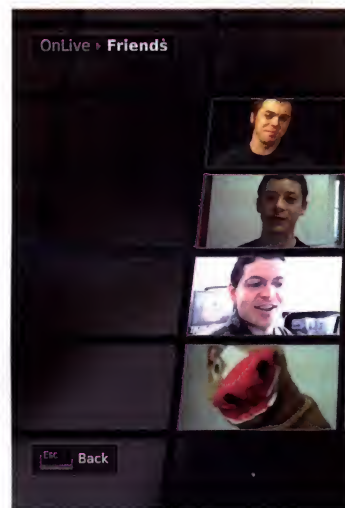
from a micro-console with USB and HDMI outputs, which uses a regular PC game controller or mouse, no special hardware is required. The end is nigh for high-end computers and consoles? But in the minds of many gamers, venting on forums post-GDC, this was a total crock.

CROCK REPORT

John Spinale, VP of Games and Media at OnLive, responds with the conviction of a man trying to convince us that the world is not flat. "In the long run, we will either prove to everyone that this works and they'll have it in their home, or we won't. We understand the scepticism: what we say sounds too good to be true. But it's a revolutionary technology."

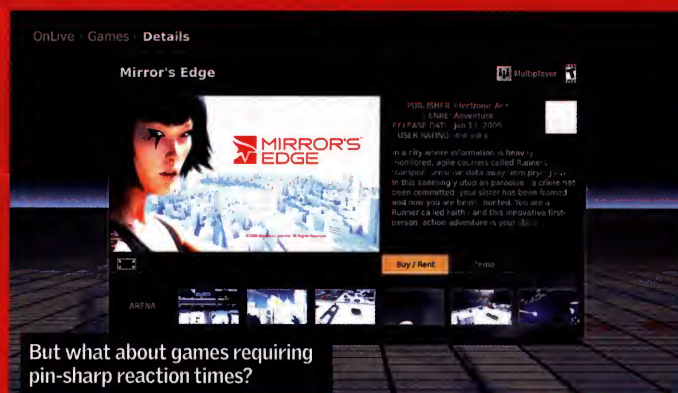
OnLive's concept was first mooted in the '90s by writer and political activist, George Gilder. In his book *Telecosm*, Gilder envisaged "cloud computing", in which remote supercomputers would end the need for powerful PCs at home. The concept struck a chord with Steve Pearlman, the creator of *QuickTime*, *WebTV*, and *Mova* (the animation tech that made Brad Pitt look like a shrivelled old git in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*). In 2002, he set up a secretive R&D team and began work on OnLive.

"At the time, if you looked at the long-term horizon, there were some interesting trends," says Spinale. "Video was heading towards high-definition, bandwidth was getting pervasive, if not



big enough to carry what was then hi-def video. People were starting to put servers up on networks to do server-based or cloud-based products. There were some interesting trends afoot. Broadband was just taking off too."

Pearlman's biggest hurdle was figuring out how to create a real-time, low-latency video Codec for hi-def video to be pushed over broadband. Seven years later, this tech still seems light



"What we say sounds too good to be true, to be honest. It is a very revolutionary technology."

John Spinale, VP of Games and Media at OnLive

years away – it's tough to stream *Skype* without lag, let alone *Mirror's Edge*. So how could OnLive cope if thousands of people played the same game at once?

It's feasible, says Martin Pipe, AV expert and writer for *Home Cinema Choice* magazine. "Thanks to remote desktop virtualisation, a networked PC can be used in much the same way as a local one – you get access to the remote PC's desktop," he says. "An example is *Windows Remote Desktop*. The other part of the equation would, in my view, be live streaming video. OnLive has

action, scene changes and/or network bandwidth fluctuations. So yes, it's possible – but could they have dealt with these problems?"

From day one, the OnLive team designed their service to work over the internet, says Spinale. "It embraces a lot of features of the internet that other streaming media services – *Skype*, or a video-on-demand service like *Netflix* – don't take into account. A lot are based on TCP/IP, a very reliable way to send packets, but the internet has all sorts of properties that make it difficult to do that in real time." Rather than fight the jittery eccentricities of the internet, OnLive embraces them. He says rather than assume there is a perfect connection between you and the server, OnLive takes the "ups and downs" of the internet into account.

Developers and publishers like what they hear, at least, with over 10 big names attached to the GDC launch. Kevin Bruner of Telltale Games thinks it's great. "We can take all the time we spend on hardware issues – drivers, compatibility, rendering scalability – and invest it in making cooler games. OnLive would be perfect for episodic games. No downloads to deal with. Just pick an episode and go."

But OnLive's success depends on a complete transformation in the way consumers see themselves owning games. "I can't see myself paying for a service-based games environment. I sometimes play a game a huge amount," says Nicolas Lovell, game analyst at gamesbrief.com. "Sometimes I don't play games for several months. If I couldn't afford it any more, then I can't go back and play the game I really liked. Those are all mental shifts that need to happen and go beyond the

point of physical vs digital to streaming vs downloading."

The shift to online streaming has begun with TV, music and film, so a mass-market, digital distribution platform for games will happen. If it'll be OnLive remains to be seen.

"I think services like OnLive are inevitable," says Bruner. "Most of the current buzz around OnLive revolves around 'can it really be done?' Of course it can be done. Can it be done today? For some games sure, for others, maybe not as well. But there will come a time when servers and latency just won't be an issue. Remember when no-one needed more than 640KB of RAM?"

NEW VIEWS

For George Gilder, the godfather of cloud computing, the revolution is beginning and home computing will never be the same again. "With the cloud condensing and precipitating around the globe," he says, "giving each teleputer thousands of times the power of a gamebox and each author the ability to collect payments for his stream, the game machine is obsolete. Forget it. With the graphics processor advancing in massively parallel arrays and being programmed for general purpose use, the old microprocessor is on the way out. Get used to it." **PCZ**

Is there anything you want PC ZONE to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
Special Report, PC ZONE,
2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

FORERUNNERS

Will OnLive fade into obscurity like these game streamers?



THE PHANTOM MENACE

The Phantom was supposed to play PC games on a TV, only to vanish amidst allegations of financial tardiness. In issue 178 a former employee recalled travelling from California to Florida for a steak and lobster dinner. "It was clear that they were blowing money left, right and centre on ridiculous things," he alleged.



SERIOUS DISCOMFORT

At 2003's E3 *PC ZONE* was shown the "future of PC gaming". Like Phantom, DISCOVER was supposed to transport PC games to the living room. A few years later the console hadn't been released, and the Chairman of Apex Digital – the company set to release the console – was briefly jailed, amidst claims of financial wrongdoing.



A CROCK OF CRYTEK

After OnLive's unveiling, *Crysis*' developers said they had look at developing a streaming game service, before dropping the idea in 2007 because bandwidth wouldn't be ready "until 2013". A bit silly, really, since even Mystic Meg can't pinpoint the future of the internet.



presumably provided the user with a virtual PC on its servers, given it a games performance video card (almost certainly virtual) and streamed its output over broadband."

But OnLive's requirements (1.5 megabit per second for standard-def TV and 5Mbps for hi-def TV resolution) could make the service untenable.

"I hate to imagine how picture quality will be affected by plentiful

PCZONE **Charts**Official data compiled by
GfK ChartTrack

- 1 **↑** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 2 **↓** **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 94%
- 3 **NEW** **COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR**
Issue 208 - 76%
- 4 **↓** **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 5 **↓** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 6 **↑** **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 7 **↓** **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 - 89%
- 8 **↑** **THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE**
N/A
- 9 **↓** **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 10 **RE** **FAR CRY 2**
Issue 201 - 90%
- 11 **↑** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 12 **↓** **COMMAND AND CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 13 **↓** **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 14 **↑** **CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR**
Issue 202 - 84%
- 15 **↑** **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 16 **RE** **CRYSIS**
Issue 188 - 92%
- 17 **↑** **LEFT 4 DEAD**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 18 **↓** **F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN**
Issue 204 - 80%
- 19 **↓** **TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.**
Issue 207 - 70%
- 20 **NEW** **THE GODFATHER II**
Issue 206 - 61%



1. FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
Contemporary sport simulation has beaten historical warfare simulation to the top slot this month.



11. WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST
This is rarely of the top 20. You people can't get enough of Azeroth.



3. COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR
You couldn't wait for us to tell you this is a great game, you impatient buggers.



19. TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.
This month's biggest fall is this flight sim which has a really a tenuous grasp on reality.



WORTHY INCLUSION

Get a batarang with your asylum

WEBSITE batmanarkhamasylum.com

EIDOS ARE PLANNING on including a deadly-yet-fantastic 14in Batarang in the collector's edition of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Hang on a minute, you might think, isn't giving someone a lethal killing device in a game box bound to be purchased by children (regardless of the age rating) is going a bit far. Well, it isn't that bad. You see, this batarang isn't actually made of metal, so instead of cutting someone up with it, you might bruise them up a bit instead. Frisbee

manufacturers might be worried though, as the batarangs are sure to replace them in parks everywhere.

As well as the batarang, which comes with its own fancy little stand, the pack will include the *Arkham Doctor's Journal*. This runs to 48 pages of background information on the inmates of the asylum, plus there is a behind-the-scenes DVD and a code for a new map pack called Crime Alley.

The whole thing will cost you around £59.99. What a bat-bargain!

WILL WRIGHT LEAVES MAXIS

Legendary developer leaves company

WEBSITE thestupidfunclub.com

WILL WRIGHT, ESTEEMED game developer and creator of some of the most beloved game series of all time, is parting ways with Maxis, the company he co-founded 20 years ago.

While some said this would mean he was also leaving publisher EA behind, this was wrong talk as his new venture, Stupid Fun Club, will still be linked with the publishing giant.

Stupid Fun Club has been described by EA as "an entertainment think tank developing new intellectual properties," which could mean anything really. EA CEO John Riccitiello spoke out, saying that EA were "looking forward to partnering with Will and his team long into the future."



The man himself, standing on a pile of money.

Will Wright himself also said: "The entertainment industry is moving rapidly into an era of revolutionary change... Stupid Fun Club will explore new possibilities that are emerging from this sublime chaos and create new forms of entertainment."

PIRATES SHARING PROVES COSTLY

World's largest BitTorrent tracker comes under fire

WEBSITE bytelove.com

IN A LANDMARK ruling, a Swedish court found the four defendants in the high profile Pirate Bay case guilty, not only sentencing each one to a year in jail, but also ordering to pay a total of \$4.5million (£3 million) in damages to copyright holders.

While the 17 companies to be compensated are mainly include media companies such as Warner Bros, Sony BMG and Columbia Pictures, game industry plaintiffs also included Blizzard and Activision.

"If you're going to convict us, convict us of disorganised crime"

Peter Sunde on The Pirate Bay conviction

Frederik Neij, Gottfrid Svartholm Warg, Carl Lundström and Peter Sunde were found guilty of having made 33 copyright-protected files accessible for illegal file sharing via The Pirate Bay website. They've vowed to appeal and at time of writing, the website was still running.

"It's serious to actually be found guilty and get jail time. And that's a bit weird," Sunde said speaking at an online press conference. "It's so bizarre that we were convicted at all and it's even more bizarre that we were [convicted] as a team. The court said we were organised. I can't get Gottfrid out of bed in the morning. If you're going to convict us, convict us of disorganised crime."

"We can't pay and we wouldn't pay. Even if I had the money I would

enjoy. It's a job killer in an economy that needs millions more jobs, not less," said Michael Gallagher, CEO of the ESA. "This decision confirms the harm being inflicted on creators of digital works by BitTorrent sites will not be tolerated."

rather burn everything I owned, and I wouldn't even give them the ashes."

The Entertainment Software Association applauded the decision. "Piracy is the single greatest threat to the development and release of innovative and creative entertainment software that consumers demand and



ESPORTS FINALS HEAD WEST

HMV signs up as official Game On! headliner

WEBSITE enemydown.eu/content/ukes2

THE UNITED Kingdom eSports Association and the topic of our Special Report last month – have announced a new venue and date for their Season One Final, plus new information on a brand new gaming event, which will be running alongside the competition.

The Dell XPS Premiership Season One finals will now run alongside HMV's Game On! event at the Olympia Exhibition Centre (near Earl's Court) on 20-21 June. They promise to create a "two-day festival of gaming", to draw more than 25,000 gamers, making it the UK's biggest event of its kind.

According to organisers, on the original date it would've been difficult to access the O² due to planned engineering works on the Tube that weekend, and with the date change came a new venue.

"This event will reflect all that's best in UK gaming – from the grassroots enthusiast right through to the Premiership gaming elite, making HMV the ideal partner for us," said Ray Mia, chief exec of the UKeSA.

"We're looking forward to a spectacular and really exciting Season One Final at the Olympia in June."



Ray Mia – UKeSA's boss man.

To be in with a chance of winning one of five pairs of tickets to the final visit this website: futurecompetitions.com/ukes2. Entries must be received by 9 June.

UKeSA
United Kingdom eSports Association

POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS

Six Days in Fallujah hits the headlines as the *Daily Mail* notices games again

WEBSITE uk.games.konami-europe.com

AS ONE MIGHT expect, the second Iraq conflict is a sensitive topic in Western countries, so most games companies have decided to create fictional Middle-Eastern locations for contemporary war games.

Atomic Games, the people behind the *Close Combat* series, have decided to eschew common thinking and set their new game right smack-bang in the heart of the conflict, recreating the events surrounding the Second Battle of Fallujah, which, our sources tell us, was the largest urban conflict to take place in the last 40 years.

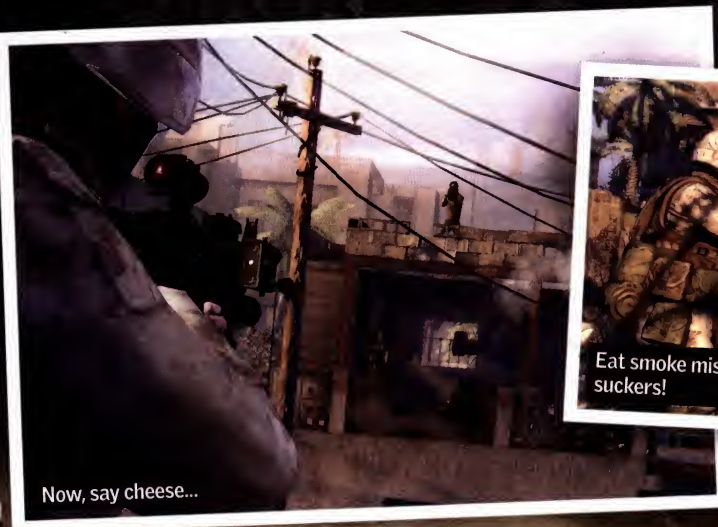
You can just imagine the scene in the *Daily Mail*'s newsroom, mouths frothing as they prepared the latest headlines in their latest crusade against the games industry. But do the flag-waving Middle Englanders have a point this time?

Certainly it could be argued that

touching such a raw nerve was a bad move on Konami's part. After all, there are still the questions over the legality of the war, the issues behind the WMD business, mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners and British soldiers being killed or wounded on a regular basis.

The whole furore over this has lead

to serious doubts being raised about the game being released at all, let alone in the near future. Maybe Konami will change the setting or the name to something less controversial, like *Gary Glitter's School Daze* or *Phil Spector: Blood Money*?



Now, say cheese...

COURTING CONTROVERSY

Jack Thompson hits wall in fight for (perceived) justice

WEBSITE jackthompson.org

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE GAME-fighting lawyer, Jack Thompson, who's been disbarred from practicing in Florida, is fighting to be allowed to practice law in the US once again. Recently he went to the Supreme Court, in an effort to resurrect his career, who refused to hear his case.

The ex-lawyer was asking the court to grant him a writ of Certiorari, which means they would agree to review the facts of his case. However, they refused to do this.

Thompson believes he still has a good chance of making a comeback

plaguing us all once more with frivolous anti-gaming lawsuits, and sending more antagonistic letters to the mother of Rockstar's Dan Houser.

"I have four more options, all better than this one," Thompson said in response to claims his fight to resurrect his legal career was over. "This was the longest of shots. All four of the others are much, much shorter shots."

It doesn't look like we've quite seen the end of him just yet, though we suspect Rockstar might be cracking open some cases of fine champagne right about now.



SHALL WE DANCE?

Stalin vs Martians promises to be the strangest title in recent memory

WEBSITE stalinvsmartians.com/en

WHEN YOU FIRST see a game whose trailer involves a man responsible for tens of millions of deaths dancing to terrible European techno, you don't necessarily think it will be a title that cites realism as a core concept.

When a second trailer involves a young girl getting her groove on while gameplay footage of Soviet tanks fighting cute and cuddly aliens, you'll worry that somebody has spiked your Dr Pepper with something illegal.

But no, it is all real. It's *Stalin vs Martians*, a game that depicts the struggle the Red Army had to undertake during World War II that wasn't

recorded in the history books. Just think of the sacrifice and the bravery – defeating both the Nazis and an alien invasion. Mind you, when you have a 40ft dancing Stalin backing up your tanks, how could you possibly fail to win?

Mezmer Games, a division of Paradox Interactive dealing with indie titles, will be publishing the game, which should be out on a number of digital download services (Steam, GamersGate, Direct2Drive etc) as you read these words. We'll have a techno-assisted review next issue.



The war that history forgot.



Stalin, pondering on whether breakbeat or techno is superior.

LAST ORDERS

Time Gentlemen, Please! draws closer to release, waiting is hard

WEBSITE www.zombie-cow.com

ACCORDING TO DAN Marshall, the man we like to call our very own, someone we have regularly considered patenting to avoid dastardly souls copying him, he's sick of wombs.

"Man, have I ever seen enough wombs for now," he said in a recent Zombie Cow Studios tweet. He is, of course, talking about *Time Gentlemen, Please!* the follow-up to last year's acclaimed *Ben There, Dan That*. Something that might be of interest to Zombie Cow followers is the new

EmotionsEngine, which "shows whether Dan and Ben are happy, grumpy or relatively indifferent to a scene."

The game is now running at a higher resolution and we are promised the character images have been "smartened up". The chaps have even managed to recruit an ally – Nick – who's busy working on particle effects. There's even a mailing list at the Zombie Cow site, should you wish to sign up and be kept aware of all the *Time*-related news forthcoming in the next few weeks.



Sex Ed was never as popular as Paper Ed.

1



ORDER OF WAR

DEVELOPER Wargaming.net PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE orderofwar.com ETA Autumn 2009

WE'VE NOW SEEN every possible combination of the words war, heroes, order, call, duty, tour, arms, brothers, medal, tales, men, faces and valour – excluding *Tour of Brothers*, *Tales of Medals*, and *Faces of Men* (you can have those ones for free, game designers).

Atrociously dull name aside, *Order of War* is based on the little known (in the West at least) but fairly successful Russian

RTS game *Operation Bagration*, which details the reclaiming of Eastern Poland from German forces by Russia's Forces during 1944.

Of course, we all know that particular operation was named after 18th-19th century Georgian Prince Pyotr Bagration, general of the Russian army who received a mortal wound at the Battle of Borodino. You'd have to be thick not to know that.



2





THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. MIGHTY REDS

Russia has a bit of a chip on their shoulder, as we're so busy congratulating one another over our little beach landing that we overlook the far larger invasion of Eastern Europe by Stalin.

2. AIR-STRIKES

When they're not being shot down, Russian bombers raze towns to the ground in a dazzling way. Could the destruction here beat even *World in Conflict*'s carnage? That's a remote possibility.

3. TO THE SKIES

You'll be commanding ground units, as well as the Russian air force, which as we know from having played *Il-2 Sturmovik* to death after death, was an effective force.

4. AMBITION

This is Wargaming.net's most detailed game to date, after their relatively wishy-washy strategies *Massive Assault* (issue 136, 41%) and *Galactic Assault* (issue 187, 62%). It employs a *World in Conflict*-style point-of-view.

5. IN DA HOUSE

Two different campaigns will see you fighting across great swathes of Poland, either across massive distances using artillery, or down to the nitty gritty scraps in entrenched, urban environments just like these. Those houses!

6. ANTI-AIR

Air units will be brought more into play than usual, only to be blown out of the sky by these massive anti-air cannons. *Order of War*'s slick visuals make the resulting fireballs and trails of smoke stand out beautifully.

7. KABLOOM

We dole out secret awards celebrating lovely skies in games, and *Order of War* is deserving of one. Not only are its clouds all nice and crisp, but its tanks and aircraft leave so much lingering smoke it's actually crazy. Actually crazy.





BROWSER GAMING GETS SERIOUS

BATTLEFIELD HEROES

For once *David Brown* uses his browser for something other than finding porn

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE battlefield-heroes.com

BROWSER-BASED SHOOTERS seem to be the in-thing for developers (by "in-thing" I mean there's a couple of them out there now) and *Battlefield Heroes* is the latest to step up to the plate to grab our Firefox-fuelled attention. But the recent announcement of *Battlefield 1943*, which has similarities in its approach to *Heroes*, could mean bad things for EA's free-to-play spin-off. That said, the good things to be found here could be said to be plentiful.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Colourful
- ✓ Free (mostly)
- ✓ Fun vehicles
- ✗ Unlockables
- ✗ Lack of kills?

This game condenses many hardcore ideas from the main *Battlefield* series, squishing them up into a casual ball and then throwing it towards us through the medium of free-to-play browser-based gaming. Well, I say free-to-play, mainly because it is, but there's a little extra expense but you need to be wary of. There's a micro-transaction model built into the game's core, which allows you to buy extra gear for your character in-game. At the time of writing, none of these will intrinsically affect the actual gameplay, and if you want to invest in a pirate skin for your GI, you can do.

The gameplay itself is a simplified version of the games which have come before it. There are four flags to capture on each primary coloured, cartoonish map and you go about doing this as either a Commando (sniper/spy), Soldier (regular class with medic capabilities) or

a Gunner (heavy weapons guy with energy shield). Realism isn't on the menu here, as you could probably have guessed by the words "energy shield". As you play, you'll be able to unlock new abilities and so on, allowing you to customise your character's skills to suit your style of play.

WORLD WAR FANTASY

Commandos can cloak and mark targets for their allies to enable to gain extra points, while Gunners can use the I Eats Grenades ability in order to absorb the impact of an explosion and gain health from it. As mentioned above, healing is provided by the Soldier, who can "blast heal" – that is, the player presses the heal button and a wave of healing emanates from him, repairing his own wounds and those of nearby allies.

There are also a limited number of vehicles to take control of, including

tanks, planes and Jeeps. To combat the vehicles, infantry units will have access to sticky bombs that, er, stick to surfaces when thrown. You have to get in close to use them, but once attached, there's no shifting them so care must be taken in their use. Planes can be damaged by regular bullets, so you don't have to attach the bombs to their underside when they go on a strafing run.

There are some niggling problems that we hope will be fixed by the time the open beta closes and the proper fun begins. For example, sniper rifles seem to be woefully underpowered, especially when you consider the fact that just rushing in with a knife seems to be a more effective way of getting kills.

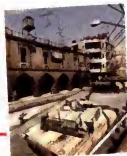
Skill matching is also a problem at the moment, as when I first logged in, I was immediately assailed by people 12 levels of experience ahead of me.

THE STORY SO FAR... BATTLEFIELD SERIES



1942
Where it all started and where the series has returned to.

2002



BATTLEFIELD 2
The tanks were beefier and the location deserty.

2005



2142
Leaping forward in time didn't mean a jump in quality.

2006



HEROES
EA are hoping this will be the first of many browser-based titles.

2009

"The good things to be found could be said to be plentiful"



I was also shoved onto empty servers far more often than I was assigned to ones where a game was actually taking place. Because of the casual nature of the game, I was unable to view a server list and select one for myself. This latter issue is one that is probably due to the lower number of players involved at this stage, but it was still frustrating.

There's also a lack of actual kills, with even those players who dominate servers appearing to only scoring nine or 10 in one round.

There are no kill assists either, so we were privy to a number of players

VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER

Why you should love the vehicles in *BF Heroes*



I hated most of the vehicles in the main *Battlefield* series, be they weird robots, chuff-chuff planes or future-modern tanks. I was never patient enough to wait around for them and, even when I did, some twonk always managed to push ahead and steal it. And I usually got drilled within seconds.

Battlefield Heroes has changed that, as the tanks, cars and planes are all good fun to use. Yes, you might get killed instantly still, but the game's cartoony nature makes you less angered when this happens. Even the planes, though still difficult to control, are much more fun for the non-skilled idiot like myself.

If you want to use them though, it might be worth investing in the repair skill, giving yourself an edge in combat.



shouting at each other for stealing kills.

And, of course, there's the perennial issue for *Battlefield* games – how confusing it could potentially be to new players. Even with the intensity cut back and the number of options and facets reduced, there's still a lot going on that will be more "Eh?" than "Cool!" when you first start getting involved.

And did I mention the fact that having item unlocks in competitive multiplayer games is still a ridiculous idea and puts new players at a huge disadvantage until they can claw their way up the rankings? No? Oh. Well consider it mentioned. **PCZ**

Darth Vader makes a cameo.



pcspecialist.co.uk

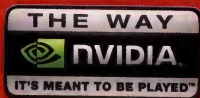


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VENICE QUEEN

The new setting is none other than 15th century Italy. The first game spanned three cities, though for now all that's confirmed is that we'll be hopping about Venice in this sequel. Muck up your free-running and you'll be dropped in the drink, but that's OK, we're told Altair's learned to swim since *Assassin's Creed*.

HOP, SKIP, JUMP

In the first game you'd bound along these beams in pursuit of victims, pickpocketees and likely positions from which to eavesdrop. The freedom to have Altair leap and flow through the game's architecture unabated will be a recurring feature of this trilogy.

**HOT
SHOT**

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com **ETA** Winter 2009

ALTAIR'S FREE-RUNNING adventures in *Assassin's Creed* captivated us, being a spectacular game full of pomp, style and flourish. Leaping from roofs of churches and mosques and diving into giant stacks of hay. Shoving enemies from Crusade-era battlements into the bustling,

crowded streets below. Paced, surgical swordfights, and the ability to slip anonymously into the throng after a bloody battle. It was flashy, and sparkling, but lacked any proper substance past that.

Ubisoft Montreal have said from the outset that the game would be the first of a trilogy, so with

Assassin's Creed II we're sure the criticisms of the first game will be addressed.

We can say with certainty though, that it's going to look pretty astounding – just like the first part to the franchise. We'll have a gondola full of info on the game next month.

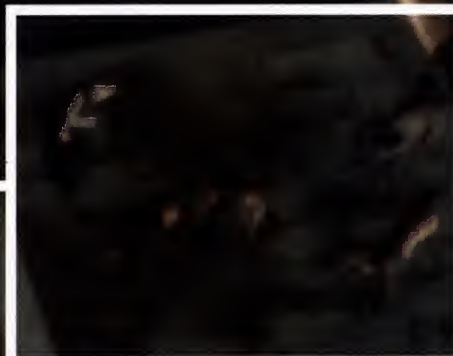
FREQUENT FLIER

Altair (or perhaps somebody else, given its now the 15th century and Altair's been dead for 300 years) looks familiar, though now he wears a chlamys - a sort of cloak that goes over just one shoulder. We're guessing you'll be channelling this guy's genetic memory from 2012, as was the ridiculous plot from the first game.



MOSH PIT

As well as unlikely athletic abilities, Altair's second favourite hobby is blending into crowds. When being chased by guards, simply finding a baying mob, relaxing your pace and walking casually among them can be enough to throw them off. The tight Venetian walkways could give this mechanic an overhaul.



ETA
**JUNE
2009**

Some Ravagers on patrol in Iudeccan Reaches. Obviously.

**SPACE MONKEYS...**

JUMP GATE EVOLUTION

Steve Hill discovers that in space, no one can hear you grind

DEVELOPER NetDevil PUBLISHER Codemasters Online WEBSITE eu.jumpgateevolution.com

ELITE, ELITE, ELITE: that's all some people ever go on about, despite it only being played by kids who stayed behind after school to attend computer club, glumly trading wireframe commodities on a BBC Micro before being picked up by concerned parents in beige Austin Allegros with plastic covering on the rear seat. Nevertheless, David Braben's space trader/combat game still seems to hold an almost mystical appeal in

certain quarters, to the extent that any sniff of a new space game immediately sees it heralded as the new *Elite*.

Admittedly sometimes the comparison is understandable, when the games are the likes of the *X* series, the *Wing Commander* spin-off *Privateer*, and *EVE Online*. However, *Jumpgate Evolution* is not the new *Elite*. What it is, according to Codemasters Online producer Mike Rowland, is a blend of *Elite*, *Freelancer*, *Wing Commander*, and *X-Wing* vs. *TIE Fighter*, all thrown together in a massively multiplayer online universe.

"It sits among all of them," explains Rowland. "Our target was to make a really good fun combat game with a lot of elements of MMOs."

Rowland is currently overseeing the final stages of the game's development

in Denver, Colorado, but flew back to the UK to guide us through the game. Nearby Leamington Spa may be grinding to a commercial halt, but every taxi driver knows the way to Codemasters, and the presentation and playtest take place in a brand-new wing of Codies' building, replete with its own pub. That said, drinking before playing *Jumpgate Evolution* isn't advisable, as even through the brittle sheen of sobriety, it has been known to cause motion sickness.

BARF BAG PLEASE

True to form, following a good hour at the helm I start to feel a bit queasy, although I bravely manage to force down a pub lunch. Also enjoying the bread and cheese is none other than former PCZ stalwart Richie Shoemaker, a man who has probably flown more

hours on *EVE Online* than virtually any man on Earth. And he's feeling as sick as a dog, even before the sweaty ciabattas are served. This is a problem that Codemasters are aware of (the motion sickness, not the Italian bread), and have included a first-person cockpit view, but it doesn't capture the kinetic experience of full-on space combat.

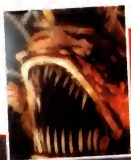
That combat takes place between three distinct nations: the militaristic Octavius; spiritual space hippies, the Quantar; and the Mafia-like Solrain. As in a regular MMORPG, you select a character and head into deep space to level up. And while there are no rats in space, it does follow a familiar formula, with early missions requiring you to take out a set number of enemies. The combat is a simple case of firing your primary guns at the handy target just in

Isn't this just 3D *Asteroids*?

THE LOWDOWN

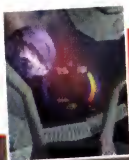
- ✓ Vast scale
- ✓ Accessible
- ✓ Integrated voice support
- ✓ Runs on low-end PCs
- ✗ Niche

THE STORY SO FAR... NETDEVIL



FISHY
Founded in Colorado, named after a flat-headed deep-sea fish.

1997



JUMP GATE
MMOs leap into space with the launch of *Jumpgate*.

2001



AUTO ASSAULT
This *Mad Max* rip-off was prime material for *NeverQuest*.

2006



JUMP GATE EVOLUTION
The new *Jumpgate* promises epic combat.

2009

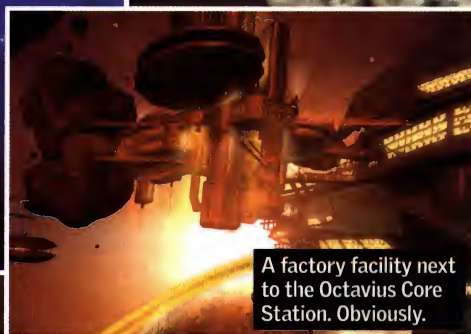
Actual jumpgates enable you to get around quickly.



A big old Battle Cruiser.



A factory facility next to the Octavius Core Station. Obviously.



Shades of *Battlestar Galactica* here.



front of the enemy, as well as locking on and letting him have it with a few missiles. With missile-dodging evasive moves also available, it's possible to get in half-decent dogfights, particularly in the PvP areas, which can host 50-a-side battles between 150 players

For the first 10-15 levels, however, it's standard PvE stuff, as you return to your hangar to claim your reward and modify your ship. New ships become available, but in case you've become attached to your old ones, you get to keep them in your hangar.

FLYING LICENCES

In a further comparison, licenses have to be acquired to fly particular ships, effectively defining your character. For instance, if you want to be a flyboy you'll take combat licenses, or alternatively

get commercial licenses to forge a living as a space trucker.

Throw in secondary tier gameplay such as mining and crafting, and there should be enough to keep the most avid space cowboy busy. While we can't see it threatening *World of Warcraft*, it'll run on similarly low-spec machines, including laptops. As Mike Rowland says, "Blizzard ensures that even guys in Korean coffee houses with terrible spec PCs can play.

"It's a great philosophy to have, you don't have to have the shiniest graphics or the latest technology in your computer to play. It's very important for us to get as many people in the game as possible because that means more customers." Ker-ching! **PCZ**

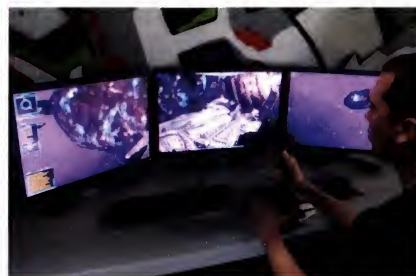
ENTER THE MATROX

If you've got two spare monitors, space is even bigger...

Anyone with this kind of elaborate set-up at home is clearly showing off. All the same, Codemasters had *Jumpgate Evolution* running on three adjacent monitors using something called the Matrox TripleHead2Go, which is apparently an external multi-display upgrade for notebooks and desktop computers. We've found them for sale online for about £30 on Amazon.co.uk, so if you're the type of person who has a spare monitor or two, it could be a cool addition.

According to the blurb, the TripleHead2Go is "ideal for professionals requiring extensive desktop space for maximum productivity increases and gamers wanting a totally immersive experience."

In reality, it's like sitting at the controls in *Flight of the Navigator*, with asteroids and star fields swirling in your peripheral vision as you struggle to negotiate the obstacles of galactic warfare in deep space without emptying the contents of your guts into a nearby wastepaper bin.



KICK OFF...

BLOOD BOWL

Jon Blyth lives out his fantasy football...DEVELOPER Cyanide Studios PUBLISHER Focus Interactive WEBSITE bloodbowl-game.com

THE PROBLEM WITH *Blood Bowl* if you're one of those who insist that everything has to be playable the second it lands in your lazy hands – is the manual. It's also the best thing about *Blood Bowl* – if you're the sort who likes to go behind the rules of the game and soak up the atmosphere.

At Games Workshop's HQ in Nottingham, there are plenty of that second group, with the number of journalists matched by the number of enthusiasts. One of them – a friendly gentleman who was too late to apply for beta access, and is getting his first hands-on – lets out a grumble of excitement as he sits down. This is not a world where the phrase "casual gaming" appears.

ETA
**SUMMER
2009**

FOULING ORCS

Blood Bowl – a board game that mixed rugby, American Football and *Warhammer* – was first released in 1987, and it hasn't remained static since: the rulebook went through four editions, before becoming the *Living Rulebook* (currently available at Games Workshop's site at games-workshop.com). Cyanide are long-term fans of *Blood Bowl* – their 2004 homage, *Chaos League*, has been bought and buried by Games Workshop as part of the deal that's seeing *Blood Bowl* developed. The evolution, fine-tuning and honed balance of the board game has been preserved perfectly in the classic version of the new videogame – which faithfully reproduces the latest version of the *Living Rulebook*.

But there's also the Blitz version – which will let you tweak the rules to play a unique league more to your tastes. And if the couple of hours spent in a full board game is too sedate for you, there's a real-time version that lets you whip through a



game in 10 minutes. If you're playing single-player, you'll be able to pause and issue commands, it'll pay to micro-manage your players. But unilateral pausing wouldn't work against a human opponent, so it'll be chaotic action.

Online, you'll be able to play for free in the public ladder, and in the private leagues that people playing their Blitz variants will set up. Your team will be constantly changing – players age, and this being *Warhammer*, they get killed in the field. If you play a game against the Chaos horde, then you're going to have to be prepared to lose some players permanently – you might even decide not to put on your best players, in case



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's *Warhammer*
- ✓ Fresh take on fantasy staples
- ✓ Chance of strategic play
- ✓ Looks smashing
- ✗ Too quirky for mass appeal?
- ✗ May be complicated

THE STORY SO FAR... BLOOD BOWL

FUMBLE!

Tynesoft collapses before releasing their *Blood Bowl* game.

1990

FIRST DOWN!

SSI, they of *AD&D* game fame, release the first *Blood Bowl*.

1995



TOUCHBACK!

Digital Jesters release *Chaos League* – their *Blood Bowl* rip-off.

2004



TOUCHDOWN!

Cyanide finish work on their proper, official, *Blood Bowl* game.

2009

Number 12 panicked when he saw the rest of his team had been eaten.



The Skaven join the party.

A FUTILE ATTEMPT...

To explain the rules of *Blood Bowl* in 100 words

The point is to move the ball to the opponent's touchdown area. Players take it in turns to move. A turn lasts until an action fails, or until you've issued orders to every player.

An action can be to move, pass the ball, attack a neighbouring player, but it's complicated by a player's "tackle zone". A tackle zone are the eight squares around a player's piece, and to enter or exit a tackle zone, you have to dodge – failure ends your turn.

Playing *Blood Bowl* well is a matter of managing these tackle zones, and playing to your team's strengths.



Physical might is no doubt negated by stupidity.



Like *Gladiators*, but less fake.

Where do they get the helmets, eh?



At times it's easy to forget it's a sports game...



Football takes a demonic twist.



they're singled out for a stomping, beating, beheading or eating.

So there's no such thing as a perfect team. But if you've got something that you consider close you can take a snapshot, and use that frozen team in matches that'll earn you no experience. These matches take place outside of the official ranking system, so they're open to file-hacking and all manner of wretched cheat abuse. Both Cyanide and Games Workshop are philosophical about the inevitability of cheats; "if you want to cheat, you're welcome – it's only a game".

The game will ship with eight races. All the usual fantasy races – dwarves, humans, orcs, goblins, lizardmen and two kinds of elves – will be present, as well as

Warhammer's races. The popular Skaven cheese junkies will be playable, as will members of the Chaos Horde. Each race has a different balance of stats that makes a different style more appropriate. Lizardmen are fast, and can make heroic runs to score. Orcs are slow, but strong – and Goblins have the chainsaw-wielding Looney, who stands a better chance of permanently mutilating a player. It's a genuinely great balance between the different styles of play.

Blood Bowl may have a serious set of rules, but it's the most light-hearted iteration of the *Warhammer* universe. It's a spoof in the same headline as *Speedball* (some of the GW enthusiasts go so far as to suggest *Speedball's* animations were inspired by *Blood Bowl's* artwork), and if you've ever played the board game – or attempted to – this is a great way to shift the emphasis away from memorising tables of stats. It's difficult to imagine how it'd appeal to anyone with no experience of the game, but the appeal of blood, guts and sports should make it attractive to gamers. **PCZ**

GET REAL...

ARMA II

Steve Hogarty enters battle and is startled by wildlife

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive PUBLISHER 505 Games WEBSITE arma2.com

AT IT'S CORE *Arma II* is a military sandbox, just like the first game – *Armed Assault* – and the original *Operation Flashpoint*, *Cold War Crisis*, before it.

So it was truly a unique occasion when I was startled by a goat. I'd been creeping through a farm, approaching the corner of a building having chased some terrorist behind it, weapon at the ready, when the goat sauntered into view and scared the shit out of me. The creature AI hasn't been finished, so at this point goats are utterly unfazed by war. It would be nice to leave it that way, I think – their AI minds existing in a state of ignorant bliss.

What's changed since *Armed Assault*? Well you now have the capacity to command and lead everything from three-men squads to entire armies comprised of infantry, armour and air support. You'll typically be on the ground when managing a small team, issuing orders by pointing at objects, vehicles, buildings and enemies to direct your men. For orders

on a larger scale, you can use the map to guide and identify objectives – give the command for a soldier to enter a vehicle, and you can have him drive 10km to pick up another unit and drive him back, for example.

In high command mode you're far too important to be getting stuck into the battle. Instead you stay back, observing and dispensing orders from afar. From your vantage point, you use the map (which uses NATO icons to designate unit types, the game proudly announces) to select great swathes of troops at a time, and then, as far as I can discern with my arse-minded



strategic head, you point them at the guys you want to kill.

You'll also be able to build bases, either out in the open plains or by placing barricades around a small town, and the enemy AI will react to the positioning of bases throughout the course of a campaign. It may be the case they'll besiege your settlement, in which case you'll be compelled to employ defences and construct weapons emplacements. Similarly, a discreetly positioned base could go entirely undetected by the enemy. From these strongholds you'll recruit



"Pew, pew!"

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ So very realistic
- ✓ Incredibly detailed visuals
- ✓ New strategy options
- ✓ Base building
- ✗ Unforgiving

There's more chatter between characters than before.



Going in for a kiss. In the dark.

Goicha.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**BOHEMIA
INTERACTIVE**



OPFLASH
Cold War Crisis has aged terribly. Really, you played it lately?

2001



ELITE
Operation Flashpoint: Elite was an Xbox exclusive, and pants.

2005



ARMED ASSAULT
Proof that Bohemia hold the still-beating heart of OpFlash.

2007

ARMA II
Arma II is utterly perplexing. We're loving it.

2009



These symbols are the ones used by NATO.



When commanding troops from afar, you can leap into their bodies at any time.

detailed supply line management though, there are some really easy-to-understand features in here too. Parachute drops are more spectacular while still remaining authentic – fall from 1,000 feet and you'll be in a controlled freefall, using your arms and legs to slow your descent and guide yourself towards your landing zone before opening your parachute. And pressing V will allow you to vault over short fences, objects which could hold back armies in previous games.

Having played both this and its peer, *Operation Flashpoint 2*, I've been asked which is better, and at this point there's really no straight answer. *Arma II* looks better and is more feature rich, but *OpFlash 2* is friendlier, without compromising depth or complexity. The idea that *Arma II* would be more hardcore holds true, but that by no means marks it out as the better game.

Such a shame that we must ally to just one of these titles while claiming the other is an affront to all things decent. Because after all, everybody knows that two similar things cannot both be worth devoting time to. That's just the way things are, surely. **PCZ**

DON'T YOU DIE ON ME

Eugh, blood...

Arma II revels in body awareness: that ability to look down at your own physical form and appreciate the fit and healthy bag of organs which nature has gifted you.

Holding down the ALT key will allow you move your head independently of your body; useful for when you're moving forward and want to glance to the side to check for enemies.

Things do become slightly ick when it comes to medic animations. Try to revive a fallen comrade and your monitor will fill with their bullet-ridden chest, as your wandering hands carry out their magical healing animation. We admit we felt a bit queasy watching this.



new soldiers and maintain repair depots for damaged vehicles.

Coupled with the high command mode, the ability to build encampments turns *Arma II* into an adept strategy game, and one in which, at any time, you can throw yourself into the thick of the fight, into the most realistic sort of one-hit-kills battle simulation you could imagine. If you were put off by po-faced military sims in the past, this game will do nothing to calm your fears: *Arma II* is a response from Bohemia to the myriad concerns of adoring *Arma* players.

In effect, this keeps the game as cripplingly inaccessible as ever. Take the lofty requirement to entry however you like – personally I love games I can't play, complaining but secretly enjoying the moments when I can't find the button that gets me out of a fighter jet – but either way Bohemia are making no concessions.

Changes aren't all fanciful command trees and bewilderingly

"Having played both *Arma II* and *OpFlash 2*, I've been asked which is better – there's no straight answer"



From handguns to Sidewinders, the arsenal is immense.

**OOK OOK!**

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Interplanetary vandal *Steve Hogarty* pays a visit to the Red Planet

DEVELOPER Volition PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE community.redfaction.com

I F YOU KNOW one thing about *Red Faction*, it's that it allowed you to dig huge holes in the deformable terrain and jump in them, condemning yourself to a subterranean existence for as long as it took to find the reset button. *Red Faction 2*... well, nobody played that, but *Red Faction: Guerrilla* seems to be a logical offshoot of the destruction-focused shooter. Now, instead of deformable terrain, the guys at Volition are pioneering things with destructable everything (except terrain).

I'd only vaguely heard the rest of the *Red Faction: Guerrilla* presentation – everything after the bit where the man from Volition said you can hit things with a massive hammer was a wordy blur. There was something about Mars, another bit where he said "open-world" a lot, and one part where he shot some blue lightning at a helicopter and everybody laughed. When the moment came to actually play the game, I dutifully grabbed a sledgehammer and headed for the nearest building. It could have been an enemy torture shack, it

could've been a puppy orphanage, I honestly didn't care, and set to work dismantling the place. *Red Faction: Guerrilla's* engine is satisfyingly impressive. If there's something you think it can't handle – say, smashing holes in either end of a bridge to see if the middle falls away – it'll do it, and it'll look more spectacular than you thought it would.

BOOM TOWN

The roof of the building I was breaking collapsed as soon as I'd removed the supporting walls, blowing up the dune buggy contained within. You can keep on smashing the resulting bits too, breaking them down into smaller pieces, until you're wading through piles of rubble, punctuated only by a sorry looking, quest-vital engineering desk.

The title refers to a Martian rebellion, of which you're a sledgehammer wielding mercenary. Six linked open-world zones,

from dust plains to icy, terraformed mountains, house missions – the story-based quests channel you through the main game, while side-quests keep you occupied and dole out upgrades, vehicles and weapons.

A morale system operates throughout these zones, and by keeping the populace happy (usually by not shooting them, not hammering their houses down, and blowing up propaganda billboards) they'll come to your aid more readily.

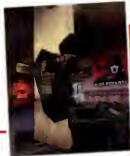
The game's cover system works around the destruction system. Take cover behind a wall and you can follow up with all the usual gumph, shooting blindly around corners and chucking grenades hither and thither. Have some of that wall blown away though, and the cover



THE LOWDOWN

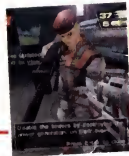
- ✓ Break everything
- ✓ No really, everything
- ✓ It's set on Mars
- ✓ You can smash stuff
- ✗ Cruddy missions

THE STORY SO FAR...
VOLITION



RED FACTION
The first game lets you burrow into walls. It is pointless.

2001



RED FACTION II
More destruction. More holes in walls. Still a one-trick pony.

2003



SAINT'S ROW 2
Volition port their crim-sim from consoles to PC. Badly.

2009

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA
A new open-world smash-a-thon game.

2009

"I dutifully grabbed a sledgehammer and headed for the nearest building"

Multiplayer's got jetpacks!

BREAK YOUR FRIENDS

'Multiplayer mode worth a boxout!' shocker

Red Faction: Guerrilla's multiplayer arenas are dotted with backpacks, each offering a different skill.

Fleetfoot will give you increased speed; Jetpack will cause magazines to patronise you by explaining that it gives you a jetpack; and Concussion will fire out an area of effect blast which blows enemies away.

Best of all, especially for anybody who saw Vinnie Jones' sublime performance in *X-Men: The Last Stand*, is the Rhino. This one allows you to charge through walls and people.

Expect plenty of "I'm the Juggernaut, bitch!" taunts as you're smashed off cliffs and into oblivion.

Cheer up.

Overcompensating perhaps?



system intelligently reacts to the new environment, ensuring your avatar won't attempt to hide behind the notoriously bullet-accommodating fresh air.

This sort of open-endedness fits far more comfortably with *Red Faction* than the linear corridors of old. Certainly it allows for wreckage on a larger scale, with later weapons using nanites to disintegrate objects at a molecular level. Demolecularise a few load-bearing struts of a 50ft tall sentry tower, and the structure will topple. Falling debris is deadly too, and *Jenga* fans with an eye for physics will be able to use buildings to crush their enemies.

Here's a game that knows its strengths, offering up more and more ways to destroy the world Volition have

thought of. Having spent uncountable amounts of money and time terraforming Mars, it's odd to imagine why its residents would make everything so fragile, but we're thankful for it.

Concerns lie with the current span of missions on offer – they're very much of the "kill this" and "destroy these" variety, but Volition promise that plot-missions will become far more interesting once the player becomes accustomed to "breaking shit". Trust us, it doesn't take long to get to grips with. **PCZ**

"Shazam!"



ON EDGE...

BORDERLANDS

Steve Hogarty pokes at the future shooter's new faceliftDEVELOPER Gearbox PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE borderlandsthegame.com

DO YOU REMEMBER *Borderlands*? It was a brown shooter, in Unreal Engine 3, on some alien planet. It had a giant monster with a vagina for a head. It boasted a roster of over half a million weapons, which were mostly variants on one another. A pink shotgun that fires ice bullets. A blue shotgun that fires lasers. A blue-green shotgun that fires slightly smaller ice bullets. And so forth, like one of those 99,999 games-in-1 handheld LCD toys that counts 999 different speeds of *Tetris* as 999 independent games.

Well, it's changed. Gearbox have realised that their apocalyptic shooter

Borderlands is pretty now. At the very least, it's infinitely more memorable than it was previously.

The premise remains untouched: an abandoned planet called Pandora has had its vast golden hoard plundered by enterprising space prospectors. You are Rolland, one of the folks left behind in this alien Wild West, a world of skags, raks and dune buggies. Co-op is at this game's core, an open-world adventure in which three of your friends can drop in and out at any time.

Borderlands' RPG leanings are slight: while it's a tactile and responsive shooter (your bullets will go where you tell them to), you'll level up and increase

assassination jobs. Of course, mates are welcome on these trips – but play solo and the AI will hop in the driver's seat, orchestrating the actions of your fellow fighters.

SO MANY GUNS

A PvP mode features in the form of *Borderlands'* arenas – underground caverns in which two players can duke it out at will, without fear of deathly consequences. Levels are matched to make fights play out fairly, the only advantages being your choice of weapon. Of which there are many.

Weapons are almost always unique in this game – imagine a random assortment of variables (ammo type, reload time, homing capabilities, and accuracy) set atop a base weapon type (handgun, grenade, machine gun, and rocket launcher) and you'll have a good

idea where this total of 650,000 guns has come from. Weapons are identifiable by colour, and you'll stumble across astoundingly fun toys in the field. Had a particularly rough scrap with a bloke armed with a repeating, homing shotgun? Be sure to raid his corpse.

Riddled with nice touches, such as firing from the floor (from *Left 4 Dead*, or *Max Payne*, depending on your preference), and of course the humongous rak hive: a towering beast housing flocks of bat-like enemies, *Borderlands* has sparked our interest for a second time. Where previously it emanated nothing but dreariness and mundanity, it now broadcasts a confident and unique visual style.

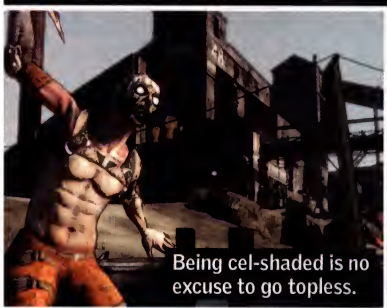
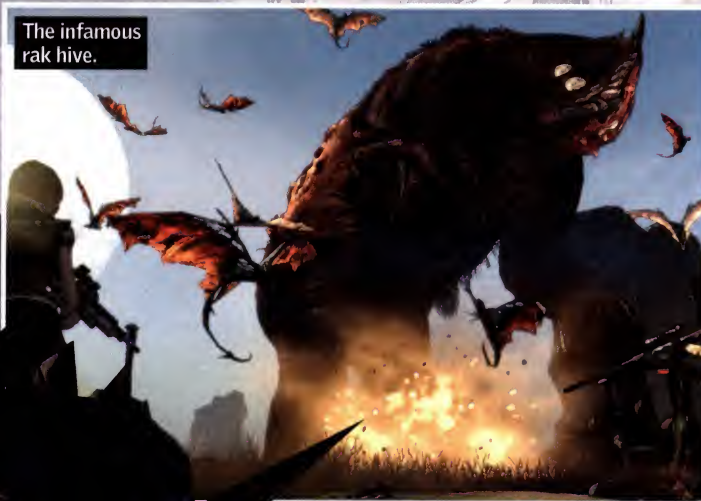
Massive kudos must be paid to Gearbox for recognising and addressing the brown. Now if they could get around to letting us play the thing... **PCZ**

"Borderlands is infinitely more memorable than it was previously"

looked like every other apocalyptic shooter in existence, and took a bold, commendable step towards creating a unique art style. It really does look beautiful, the bright, saturated stabs of colour leaping from the line-drawn backgrounds, coupled with the sketchy pen-shading on rocks and cliff faces.

your stats as you play, moving into more and more dangerous territory as the game goes on. Shanty towns act as quest hubs. From these locations, bulletin boards and locals dish out buttery missions and toasty tasks, from the rather mundane "kill 10 of these things" to the more exciting

The infamous rak hive.



Being cel-shaded is no excuse to go topless.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Lots of guns
- ✓ Lots of space
- ✓ Lots of vehicles
- ✓ Lots of co-op
- ✗ Potentially console focused

THE STORY SO FAR...
GEARBOX



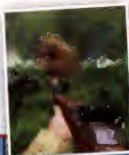
DRIVE
Bam! Gearbox begins existing. We love you guys.

1999



OPPOSITION
Gearbox make the *Half-Life* expansion, *Opposing Force*.

1999



BROS B4 HOES
Brothers in Arms proves short fences stop Nazi invasions.

2005



ALIEN
With *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, Gearbox's plates are full!

2009

A brave new look for the apocalyptic shooter. Bravo Gearbox.

ETA
**AUTUMN
2009**



Melee attacks to monster's wrists are effective.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Alright, so it didn't look that bad before.



Ever seen a more shocked looking gimp?



Though it's adopted a stark new visual style, *Borderlands* wasn't the worst offender when it comes to brown, dreary landscapes. Just look, here's a screen from over one year ago, featuring some of the weapons-laden vehicle combat. Multiple players can hop into buggies, with one in the driver's seat and another manning the sunroof-mounted cannon. During high-speed chases, you'll be able to leap from your vehicle to carjack your enemies – cars can transform at the touch of a button too. The Salt Racer, so named for it's high performance when speeding across the game's massive salt lakes, can adjust its front wheels to adapt to rough terrain.

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"The Cyborg has a body that can be configured to fit your hand"

Phil Wand, issue 194

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ETA
**EARLY
2010**Our money's on the
one with the mask.**BACK TO THE FUTURE...**

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 3

David Brown bursts through Dave Brickley's chest to bring news of Rebellion's extra-terrestrial return

DEVELOPER Rebellion PUBLISHER SEGA [WEBSITE rebellion.co.uk](http://www.rebellion.co.uk)

REBELLION REALISE THEY have a hard act to follow. Not only have they got their own classic *Aliens vs Predator* title to beat, but they must also contend with the relentless fanboys of Monolith's second game. And some people who happen to be obsessed with the films. Can they pull off the impossible? Dave Brickley, senior producer on the *AvP3* project, thinks they can...

Q So, tell us what's been going on with *AvP3*.

A Our philosophy has been that when the license became available, with the right publisher in SEGA, the game was really coming

home. This time we feel we can really do all the things we wanted to the first time round, with the benefit of all this new hardware that we have at our disposal. We've been beaver away on that for some time now and we're looking forward to talk about it at last!

The original is fondly remembered by so many people – you can still see its impact nowadays, which is remarkable. It's fun to return to the whole *Aliens* thing, and we're not just making a sci-fi shooter here – we're looking at some of the most iconic movies of the last 20 years. Their influence has been so far-reaching, it's just been really pleasurable to return to that original source and present it to a whole new audience.

Will it follow the same three-species format as the previous games?

Yes, it's basically true to the originals in that you will experience a narrative from three massively different perspectives, from the viewpoint of the three main species in the game, and you'll be able to go through each individual campaign as you like, at will.

We obviously want to encourage people to play all three perspectives to the fullest, basically to experience all the crossovers that happen. It's something we're trying to really build into the experience, so that you might pass through an area as a marine that you've already seen as the predator. That really adds to the fear factor, knowing that



Dave Brickley
Senior producer, Rebellion

the creature will be there stalking you. There's an awful lot of effort gone into making this aspect really special.

Will you be doing anything outrageous with the material or trying to stick to canon?

It follows on from the source material and it references that sort of thing,

Weyland-Yutani's foot-warming therapy was a hit with xenomorphs.



yeah. It's basically set 30 years after *Aliens*³. The Weyland-Yutani corporation are still very much a part of the universe at this point and they are exploring a recently colonised planet called BG386. During this expedition they come across an artifact, lo and behold, into which they send an expedition party. However, they aren't the only guys that are interesting in this.

This is entirely consistent with the long-standing view of what *Aliens vs Predator* is all about: the predators as this honourable species using the aliens to test themselves, while the humans see it as something to be exploited, which goes all the way back to the original comics.

We're very keen to stick with this consistent theme and to also have crossovers, so people who are familiar with the series can have lots of things to recognise.

Will it be more *Alien* or *Aliens*?

It depends on what character you're playing as, but also on what part of a mission you're on.

Across the species there's always going to be a different feel. If you consider what it's like to be a predator, or what you as the player would want to experience as one, he's a creature with honour, who wants worthy opponents, who's presented with a scenario and has to succeed. He's going to use a variety of tactics in order to achieve said goal. At one point that might require stealth and at another it might need just pure balls-out action.

We're looking to give the player a real series of emotions, not just across the species but also during individual encounters – as the predator you're the hunter, as the marine you're the hunted, and as a xenomorph you're just a nasty little bastard, which, frankly, is exactly as it should be.

What sort of multiplayer options are you looking at?

The original *AvP* is still played and still admired because of the ability to present three very different species in one arena. It pioneered some modes that are still with us and have become

IGNORE SHELLSHOCK

Should we be worried?

Rebellion's last game, *Shellshock 2: Blood Trails*, wasn't so good. Should people be worried about *AvP3*?

"There was a lot of critical acclaim for the likes of *Sniper Elite* and *Rogue Trooper*," Brickley told us. "It's helpful to give people a reminder of what the current team, not just the one of 10 years ago, is capable of."

"*AvP3* game has been in development for a long time and let's just say that SEGA are massively behind this title, I mean really excited about it and there's no way they would be doing that if they weren't entirely confident in Rebellion's ability to deliver a really top-notch experience."



commonplace nowadays. There's a real desire to keep the spirit of that, not just keep it but evolve it even. It's not a bolt-on in that respect.

You can't really think of *AvP* without thinking about what it pioneered in terms of multiplayer gaming and that's something that's been intrinsic to the design of *AvP3* from the very start. When we give out the details of that, we're really sure people are going to be delighted with them. As for co-op... it's a possibility!

Can you be a predalien?

"Can you be a predalien?", "Will it appear at some point?" You know, I think we'll all have an answer on that one soon enough.

Will your marine character be able to say things like "Game over, man! Game over!"?

I think, in a sense, we're looking to make people smile without making them feel they're just playing a "Best of..."

Aliens was 1986, it's influenced so many things that you have an idea in your head of what a space marine does. We don't want to retread old ground in that respect, we want to keep the spirit of the source, but also keep the game fresh. So, you know, it's not intended to be a remake of the movies, I think that would let people down.

There's been a conscious effort not to be lazy, but the guys that are writing it are such big fans that we're confident we can get enough nods that people will recognise without everyone thinking we just ripped off the script!

Will you be able to play through that chest-bursting sequence again?

You can't be asking me that, it'll be spoiling all the fun! What we can confirm we'll be doing is that we're going to be giving narrative to each species that you play through. I'm not sure how much I can say without giving anything away! We hope players won't be disappointed, certainly. **PCZ**

"We want to keep the spirit of the source, but keep the game fresh"



"Time for your shot."

FROM THE DEEP...

BIOSHOCK 2

Return to Rapture? *Steve Hogarty* never left...

DEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE somethinginthesea.com

RAPTURE WAS IN tatters at the start of *BioShock*. Entire sections were flooded and splicers were up to their arses in seawater. The underwater metropolis was losing a fighting battle with water pressure, and was folding in on itself like a giant paper cup. After all, everybody was dead, and that included all of the engineers and technicians who kept the place dry. There's no way you could set a game in Rapture after the events of the first game – it's

physically impossible, the place should be sunk, submerged, drowned and washed away.

So 2K Marin have ignored all that and set *BioShock 2* in Rapture, 10 years after the events of *BioShock*. You're a Big Daddy – actually the first Big Daddy, a prototype of the hulking great maniacs you fight in the first game. A grown up Little Sister has gone properly mental, escaping Rapture to abduct and return to the city Little Sisters rescued in the original game. Now, with her brood of gene-sucking children back at her side, she's got it into her head that she must maintain the ghoulish balance of Rapture. She'll destroy anybody who attempts to rock this underwater boat, and that's no idle threat considering she's kitted herself out to be a lithe, acrobatic version of a Big Daddy – the deadliest creature the city's seen yet.

You're no plodding slagheap yourself. As the prototype Big Daddy you're faster and more adaptable than your successors, and most importantly, you're able to use plasmids – the genetically-endowed superpowers of the first game. Of course, giant drills and rivet guns will be available to you too, allowing for gruesome splicer dismemberments. So is this a step away from the cautious gameplay of the first *BioShock*?

"One of the core values of *BioShock* is the sense of player identity," begins Jordan Thomas, creative director at

2K Marin, "and the authorship of the identity being very much a consensual experience." Authorship of identity, consensual experience. Got it.

"Rather than stepping into the shoes of something that does one particular thing," continues Thomas, "we ask you a bunch of questions about what kind of player you are and support those choices. So hacking is part of a manipulator play style – the play style that wants to have every advantage. You're a faster, more lean Big Daddy as the prototype, but you're

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Sequel to *BioShock*
- ✓ Big Sister looks great
- ✗ Too familiar looking
- ✗ Protagonist may lack appeal
- ✗ Little Sisters could irritate



You'll get to use the powerful rivet gun from the first game.

ETA
**WINTER
2009**



You're a Big Daddy, but Splicers will still have a go.



This is not a sight you'll want to see.

Mix and match plasmids to create flaming tornadoes...

still a burly character. So we're having to do new evolutions of the plasmid system, and some of the other systems like hacking, that allow you to further fork your play style and still play as a subtle player if you're interested."

GENE BLENDING

Plasmid upgrades will have a much more immediate effect this time round, and will also be capable of being used alongside regular weapons. So sticking a splicer on the end of your drill, before grilling him with your Incinerate plasmid will be an option. Splicers will react differently to you too, considering what you are. They'll run from you when their numbers have been whittled down enough.

Hacking remains, though in what form we're not told. You'll still be able to amass a small crew of bots to follow you about the place, and now we're promised you'll be able to repair your tiny mechanical friends should you form a particularly close bond with them.

"Things like hacking remain important for the player's expression," confirms Thomas, "and we're trying to make *BioShock 2* a more expressive game, rather than a less expressive game just because you happen to play as an iconic character."

As a beta version of a true Big Daddy, you begin without a Little Sister, and must steal one from one of the many other Big Daddies glomping their way around Rapture. Whereas previously



"You begin without a Little Sister, and must steal one"

As a Big Daddy, it's your job to prevent this.

BIG BALLIN' IN RAPTURE

Online multiplayer confirmed

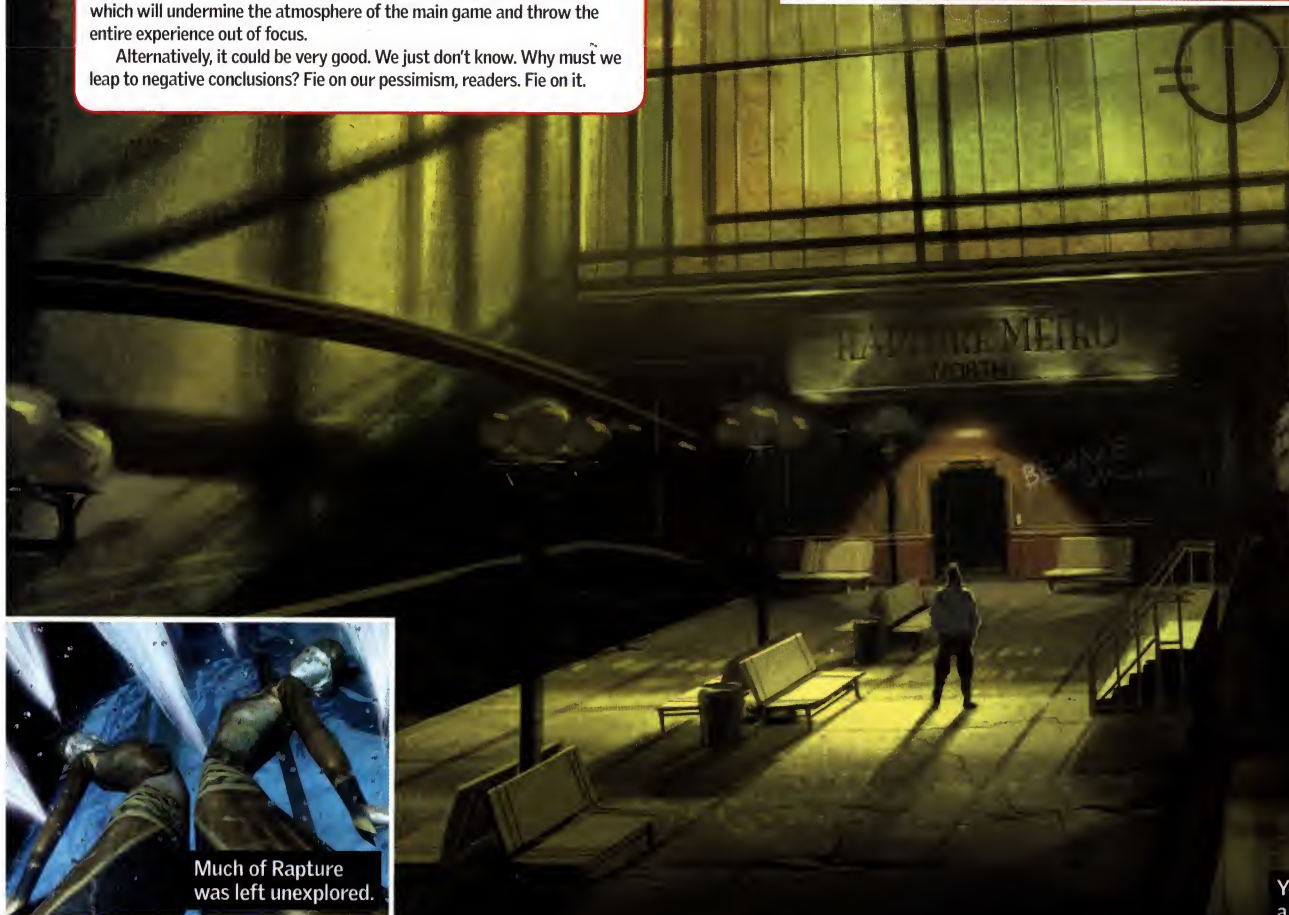
The cynic in us recoils in horror at the thought of a tacked-on multiplayer mode intended to placate Microsoft and their precious 360s, but as of yet 2K Marin are not prepared to talk much about the multiplayer side of *BioShock 2* other than to confirm that it exists.

Co-op isn't in there – which would've been welcome – but instead we expect to be duelling with other Big Daddies in a sort of deathmatch, which will undermine the atmosphere of the main game and throw the entire experience out of focus.

Alternatively, it could be very good. We just don't know. Why must we leap to negative conclusions? Fie on our pessimism, readers. Fie on it.



Unlike Big Daddies, Big Sister is a one-off.



Drilling into splices is as gory as you'd imagine.



Much of Rapture was left unexplored.

You wait all day for a bathysphere....

➤ you'd make strategic preparations to bring one of the beasts down before murdering or rescuing the child companion, in *BioShock 2* you'll be choosing whether to murder, rescue or adopt. Little Sisters are so broken that they'll scarcely recognise that you're not their protector, instead they'll scamper over to you, excited to see that you've returned from that particularly gruesome death they just witnessed.

Adopt the kid and she'll hop on your shoulders, collecting Adam (the game's primary stat-boosting resource) from

corpses that are strewn about. Allowing her to do this summons, as it did in the close of the first game, waves of Splicers. 2K Marin are calling this the "opt-in siege", and it's here that we see the ingenuity of preparation seen in the first game. As you can choose exactly when to allow your Little Sister to trigger this attack, you can set trip wires and mines, prepare your sentry bots and slot in your preferred plasmids. Succeed and the Adam is yours.

Alternatively, you can pursue the short-term gain, forgoing all of this

"You'll be choosing whether to murder, rescue or adopt"





Still creepy as fuck.

adoption nonsense and drilling the precious resource straight out of the little girl's face. Either way, your tampering with the balance of power in the city will eventually catch the attention of the previously mentioned Big Sister, the heiress to the throne that is *BioShock 2*'s cover.

Her svelte form is supplemented by the same sort of augmentations that are flaunted by Big Daddies – although instead of a bulky drill she sports a retractable blade, which she can use not only to slice you in two, but to cling to any surface. Her approach is heralded by the cries of Little Sisters, who'll

dolefully inform you that "Big Sister doesn't want you to play with me..." before the bulb-headed witch appears, clambering along ceilings and dry-humping the art deco furniture. She's a truly terrifying sight, the build up to her eventual appearance wearing you down to a quivering wreck before the mere sight of her skittering towards you, blades all a-twitter, has you lying limp on the floor, paralyzed by your own crippling, unabated fear.

You vomit on reflex, the contents of your stomach pooling around your face, the warmth of it touching your cheek, contrasting the hard, cold tiled floor as the insane mech-woman jabs you in the gut with her knife. Stab stab stab.

That's only slightly exaggerating how scary this thing is.

On the opposite side of the coin to this panic-inducing, gorey underwater hell, there are moments of absolute

calm. At times, you'll leave the confines of the submerged city and stroll out on to the seabed. Eerily peaceful, the only sound is the ocean's bassy roar.

TAKE A WALK

Often you'll have the option to peer into flooded chambers, places you visit in the first game. Above you, a tiny cluster of shimmering pinpricks marks the distant surface, and all around you, the city of Rapture rises silently from the bedrock.

This was a sight we barely glimpsed in the first game – in fact we saw the whole of Rapture only once, and that was during the opening scene, when you were locked in a bathysphere – this time we're beholden to the glorious vista each time we're allowed on the seabed.

Lessons should have been learned from *BioShock*. While the closing scenes of the original featured some of the most impressive locations of the entire



Mister Bubbles to the rescue!

This is pretty much you failing to do your job.

SPLICERS

They ain't getting nicer...

This time around, while some masks remain, most of the splicers you'll encounter have abandoned masks and show their deformities freely.

"It's an important that you see them react with genuine fear," explains Jordan Thomas, creative director at 2K Marin. "They'll show this with unique and expressive animation. We thought 'Well, if I'm a Big Daddy, there's no way that splicers will want to fight me with the same fervor as when I was Jack Hands with my chain tattoo.'"



game, it soon lost pace and was muddled by that most dire of unoriginalities, the End Of Level Boss.

2K Marin vow not to make the same mistakes again, retaining the idea of multiple endings, but making the player far more aware of which they're heading for. Audio logs will still propel the story, offering as the first did tertiary information intended to flesh out the game world. And, as ever, if you're some sort of thicko you can traipse through the game ignoring everything but the parts where you ram a drill through a man's torso.

BioShock's a hard act to follow, but Rapture obscured hidden depths the first time round. Our visit showed just one segment of the city, just one vertical slice of insane characters. Doubtless 2K Marin will indulge us in exposing more of Rapture's madmen, and with some of the key development team members from the original game, we're certain they've got at least one more Sander Cohen in them. **PCZ**

ETA
**JUNE
2009**

NA-NA-NANNA...

BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

ION BLYTH TAKES THE CRIME-FIGHTING NINJA BACK TO HIS ROOTS

DEVELOPER Rocksteady Studios PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE batmanarkhamasylum.com

SO, I FIND myself in this difficult situation. I've written about *Batman:*

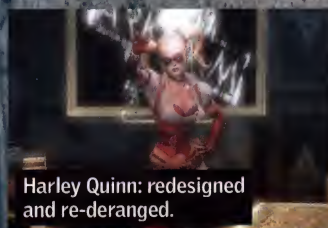
Arkham Asylum before, and I was in a cynical mood. I was suspicious and brittle from the ridiculous brawling mess that was *Watchmen: The End is Nigh*. However much Eidos pressed home that *Arkham Asylum* was true to DC's dark world of *Batman*, and however eloquently anyone from Rocksteady expressed their love of Batman's universe, I wasn't listening. I was sat there, with my arms crossed, thinking "I can't believe DC let *Watchmen* get turned into *Streets of Rage*. It should've been an RPG, or something".

Now, you find me in a better mood. This time, I've actually played enough

of *Arkham Asylum* to get a real feel for it. And I'm embarrassed to say that I'm fired up. I'm so directionlessly enthusiastic, I want to launch into a review, right now. Who cares if it's based on incomplete knowledge? It'll be passionate, and if you shout loud enough and use the strongest swear words, no-one will argue with you.

NUTS IN THE HOUSE

As you may know, you spend the new game as Joker's hostage in the overthrown and iconic madhouse of *Arkham Asylum*. But even before the power shifts to the chuckling nihilist, you're completely in his thrall. In the opening movie, you drive through the seats of Gotham, forced to listen to his theatrical babble. As you take control



Harley Quinn: redesigned and re-derived.



Sound the ventilation shaft klaxon.

of Bats, and escort the restrained Joker through the corridors of *Arkham* in stoic Bat-silence, you're an audience to his monologue. And when the villain's fanatical lover drops the lever and you switch roles from captor to captive, it's ironic that that's when you finally get control. It's confirming what you already knew. Batman's nothing without a crisis to deal with. He doesn't call the shots – he dodges them.

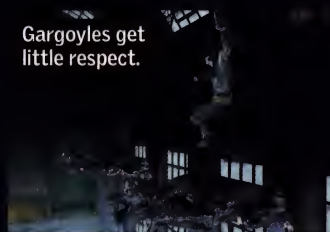
The *Unreal Engine* gives Joker a sickening sheen. If it was any other character, I'd be annoyed by the slick, nauseating complexion. On Joker, it's pallid, oily and perfect. As for the melodramatic words tumbling out of his mouth? They're written by Paul Dini – a producer and writer from *Batman: The Animated Series* who

made Joker his speciality – and range from deliberately irritating, to deliberately amusing. There's such an array of talent at work on this game, that you feel what you're supposed to feel. Before getting too deep into that, though – I'm talking to Sefton Hill, the

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Incredible atmosphere
- ✓ Great stealth-action hybrid
- ✓ Superb writing and acting
- ✓ Continual brilliant moments
- ✗ No Cesar Romero

Gargoyles get little respect.



Step back, I've got a radio-controlled batarang.



Zsasz: your intro to stealth and detective work.



If only there was an unlockable Ka-Pow mode, we'd be away.

founder of Rocksteady Games, and it's time I let him get a word in edgewise. Seriously, I spent this long telling him how much I loved the game before the interview started.

First things first, the question everyone must ask: is this your own Batman? Or an homage to a particular favourite Batman of yours?

"Arkham Asylum is based on the core Batman licence from the DC comics. We went straight back to the source material, the inspiration for all the different versions that followed. We really wanted to get across the psychological elements, and the detective elements, which are something that haven't been fully explored in a Batman game. Those are the two fundamental driving forces – authenticity and fun."

The tension between those two elements interests me, so I ask if there was anything fun that was taken out because it wasn't moody enough, or anything moody that failed the fun test. "Not really, no."

**"AS YOU ESCORT JOKER,
YOU'RE AN AUDIENCE TO
HIS MONOLOGUE"**

"See the stubble?
That means I'm too
hard to shave."



Detective mode: comes with X-ray specs.

➤ Batman is really well-suited to be a videogame character. He may not have had the best history in games, but there's that dichotomy between his vulnerability and his power. He has all these great gadgets, and he's trained his body to perfection. He's pushed every element of what being human is

to the absolute limit, but at the same time, he's still just a man. Those are the things that make him such a great game character. So there wasn't that much tension."

This thoughtful attitude has influence in every decision in the game. Everything strikes a balance between the elegance, power, and – ultimately – the mortality of Batman. In this game Batman doesn't regenerate, and there are no health packs. However, your energy refills as you earn experience. Platforming is kept low-key, thankfully, with jumping and climbing done

automatically, and most acrobatics left to his gadgets.

Speaking of gadgets, the fact that you've got infinite batarangs (a fact Sefton justifies with the phrase "well, he is Batman") is offset by the fact that they're completely non-lethal. They simply stun the target, giving you an opportunity to leap in for the knock-out blow. Upgrades are (mostly) limited to your gadgets – multiple or remote-control batarangs, explosive gel that

can be triggered by proximity, and a batclaw – based on the idea that Batman is already at the peak of his physical powers, and isn't likely to suddenly realise he can wall climb.

When it gets down to combat, there are two types of goon. Unarmed assailants aren't too dangerous: you can chain long combos against them, earning more XP and opening up enhanced moves. Combat is split between attack, stun, and counter – you'll know when to counter when you see the alert coming from a goon's head. It sounds simple, I say. Sefton replies, "We wanted it to be simple,

BATMAN RE-ROLLED

The new designs for the classic characters



JOKER

Do you need introduction to Joker? From Cesar Romero's camp chuckler, to Heath Ledger's lip-smacking psychopath, via Jack Nicholson's combination of the two, the Joker that is running Arkham is very definitely from *The Animated Series*. But that was bound to happen – he's voiced by Mark 'Luke Skywalker' Hamill and written by Paul Dini.

COMMISSIONER GORDON

Grizzled, meaty Commissioner Gordon was transformed into a cheerful Irish dolt in the '60s TV show, but one thing remained – his absolute trust in, and dependence on, Batman to deal with the inhuman threats that face his beloved Gotham. Even when the world turns against Batman, Gordon always believes in him.

HARLEY QUINN

A creation of the '90s, Harley Quinn is the high-pitched bimbo-sounding masochist/psychopath/psychiatrist who fell in love with Joker. Perhaps she realised they were meant to be, when she noticed her name contracted to a synonym of "clown". Her devotion in the face of Joker's brutality towards her is devastatingly recognisable.

BANE

The first really challenging boss fight, Bane is a creature powered by – and dependant on – the super-steroid, Venom. This incarnation of Bane is much more monstrous and idiotic than some of his predecessors, but that's all part of the re-imagining of the characters – they're all original designs from WildStorm's studios.

ORACLE

Oracle is Commissioner Gordon's daughter. She was once the most well-known Batgirl, until the Joker shot and sexually assaulted her in *The Killing Joke*, leaving her paralysed from the waist down. Now, she's Oracle – super-hacker and information broker for DC's superheroes. And the only superheroine to be named after a Teletext service.

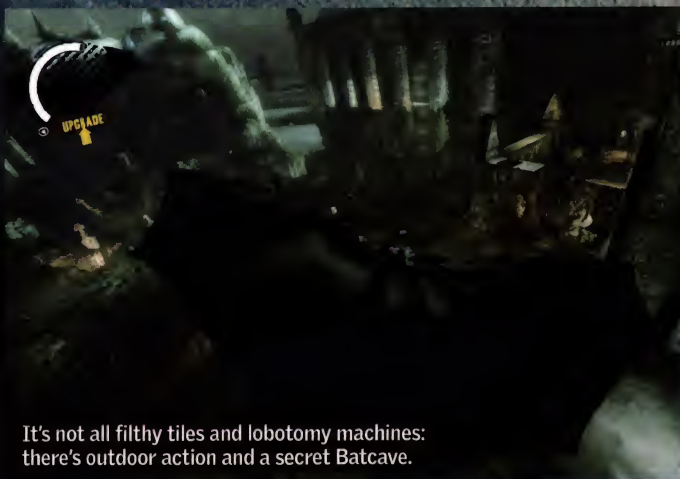
VICTOR ZSASZ

Victor is a self-mutilating serial killer, who carves a tally on his body for every person he murders. Holding a guard hostage, Zsasz is your introduction to using the game's Detective Mode. You'll see his mental state, a path to stealthily sneak around him, and learn to power glide into his back, before delivering the finishing blow.

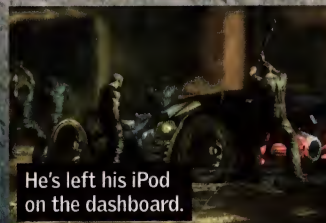
"EVERYTHING STRIKES A BALANCE BETWEEN THE ELEGANCE, POWER AND THE MORTALITY OF BATMAN"



"Oh, do I look totally dramatic from this angle? I wasn't trying at all, I guess I'm just awesome."



It's not all filthy tiles and lobotomy machines: there's outdoor action and a secret Batcave.



He's left his iPod on the dashboard.



A batcave means batgadgets.

because in an action-adventure game like this, you're not fighting all the time, so you can't be expected to learn and remember 50-move combos. So the moves are easy, but chaining them together is the real skill."

GET IN LINE

As an armour-clad martial artiste, they shouldn't pose too much of a problem. It's when you meet the goons with guns, that's when you're forced to take a strategic role. These are what Rocksteady are calling playgrounds – rooms where you're forced to despatch the villains one at a time, using stealth

and fear to destroy your victims. Enemies can be calm, nervous or terrified based on your presence in the room – and they behave differently in each state. Does their mental state really affect the game, I ask? "It affects their behaviour. When they're terrified, they'll blind-fire around corners. When they're nervous, they're more likely to turn around and spot you. They have different patterns in different moods, and that affects how you should tackle the room."

So did DC have much input into the process? "We did work with DC a lot, certainly at the start of the game.

We were interested in their opinions – not so much in what worked in previous *Batman* games, much more about what they loved about the character. We knew they'd be our harshest critics. We've got loads of Batman fans here, but they live and breathe it. We mainly talked story, but also what we wanted to do with the gameplay."

The developer's involvement with Batman's owners went deeper than that. Every single character in the game is a re-designed creation.

These characters are no strangers to reinvention, but all the characters in Rocksteady's *Asylum* have been

designed by comic art legend Jim Lee's WildStorm Productions.

Was it a source of tension, dealing with so many people whose areas of expertise lie so far outside of the realm of videogame development? And not just DC – Paul Dini may be a well-established screenwriter, having penned episodes of *Lost*, as well as *Batman: The Animated Series*, and a Batman-orientated comics – but *Arkham Asylum* is his first videogame. Was any of that a problem?

"Well, when you're in development, you're always so aware of the costs of what you're doing. And someone from outside that might make a suggestion that would take years to build, and they don't realise it. But sometimes, people suggest things that you can do – but in a different way, so it's nice to have input from outside of the usual game thinking.

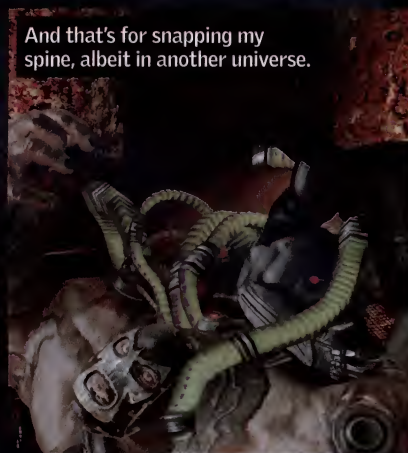
"The same with Paul Dini – who hadn't worked on a game before. His TV and comic book approach was very different – he'd have ideas that were very expensive, or even impossible to achieve in a game. But he also had ideas about how to fill out the world, and make it worth exploring in ways that you can't do in other media. Other things, we don't make you see – the history of



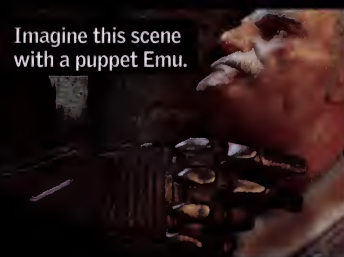
Don't just watch, Batmobile – run them over, or something.



Slo-mo finishing moves: the closest you'll get to a KLA-BLAM!



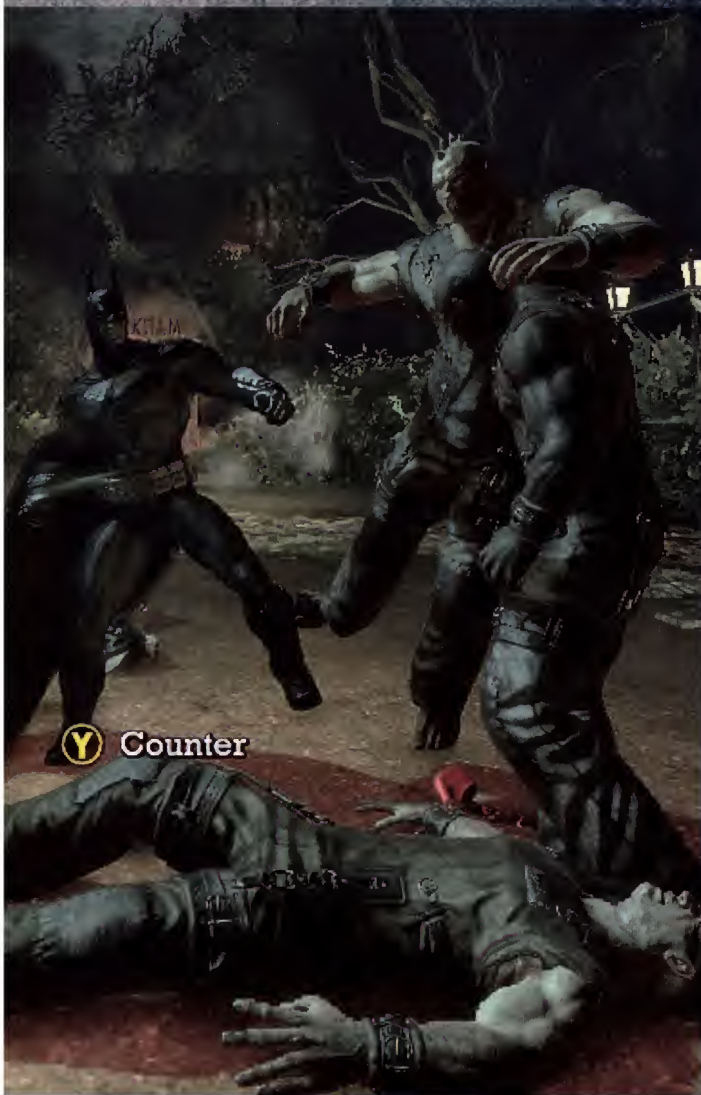
And that's for snapping my spine, albeit in another universe.



Joker – insanity incarnate.



Arrows! He's thinking about punching you.



HIS WONDERFUL TOYS

Q. What would Batman be without his gadgets?
A. Naked.

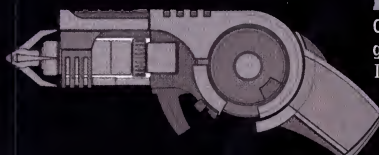
BATARANG

Infinite in number, batarangs are used to stun enemies. They're useful, but in situations where you need to take out a bunch of armed goons, the stun time isn't long enough to make it an adequate solution. Upgrades for this weapon for remote control, multiple batarangs, and improved stun times.



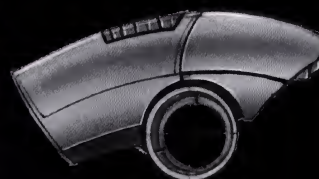
BAT CLAW

Once you reach the secret Batcave, the grappling hook gets a grabbing upgrade. It's the most traditional game-like weapon designed mainly to give you access to previously unreachable areas by shifting boxes, pulling off distant grills – it's a key in disguise.



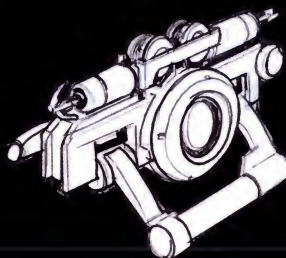
EXPLODING GEL

Detective Mode lets you see structurally weak walls – these can be of use in the playgrounds, as well as providing solutions to puzzles. Upgrades to the gel include proximity triggering, and a variable frequency transmitter that allows you to remotely detonate three separate patches of gel, one at a time.



REVERSE SUSPENSION

It's a one-off upgrade, but it's useful in the playgrounds – the ability to drop from a gargoye, hoist up an enemy and leave them dangling. Not only does it take them out of action, it's Batman's equivalent of leaving a head on a spike. When the other goons find him, it'll shit them up and change their behaviour.



the buildings, they were all built at different times. If you're looking for that sort of thing, you'll see and feel the history. And if you're not, you won't."

Hill is philosophical that people might run around his game yelling "THWOMP!" and "KA-BLOOEY!". But some of the collectable Riddler Trophies are worth finding, just for the insulting comments you're rewarded with. The Batman may be concrete in his stoicism, but that

doesn't mean there's no jokes.

"That's one of the great things, working with the characters. Some of the lines from Riddler and Joker are

genuinely funny. I've played it a lot, and they still make me laugh."

NO DISTRACTIONS

It's not just Riddler Trophies you'll be collecting – there's a huge amount of background stuff that adds to the depth of the characters and the world. Audio logs may be a traditional way to give extra information to those who want it, without forcing the player to slow down – but Rocksteady stops the playback when you re-enter the world. There's a time and a place for listening to Killer Croc threaten his nurses, and it's not when you're throwing batarangs at chattering Joker teeth.

"We really wanted that brutal feel to the combat. With ranged weapons, you can have everything spinning around, and that knock-back effect,

but we really wanted the hand-to-hand combat to be more visceral." He's kind of meandered away from the point I was trying to get him to say, so I'll say it for him now: Batman may not have the most gymnastic melee combat in the world, but there's an impressive solidity to the combat. Everything connects. And there's a dramatic angle to the combo finishers, that's a throwback to the skew-iff camera angles in the campy '60s series. Was it hard building solid melee in the Unreal Engine? "Well, it's a toolset, so you can do what you want with it."

Arkham Asylum is a beautiful world. In the first round of publicity, Eidos did the game a disservice by being coy about the locations of the game. The natural fear was that Arkham Asylum would be endless medical corridors,

smear tiles and rusty lobotomy machines. There's plenty of all that, but there's plenty of outdoors work, and four separate buildings, each with its own design and feel.

As you might be aware, it's not just Paul Dini who's come from *Batman: The Animated Series*. Harley Quinn, Joker's infatuated lover first appeared in that show, and is now a major player in Joker's capture of the (un)secure hospital. But it's the voices that'll hit you hardest. Kevin Conroy reprises his role as Batman from the '90s cartoon, and Mark Hamill returns as Joker.

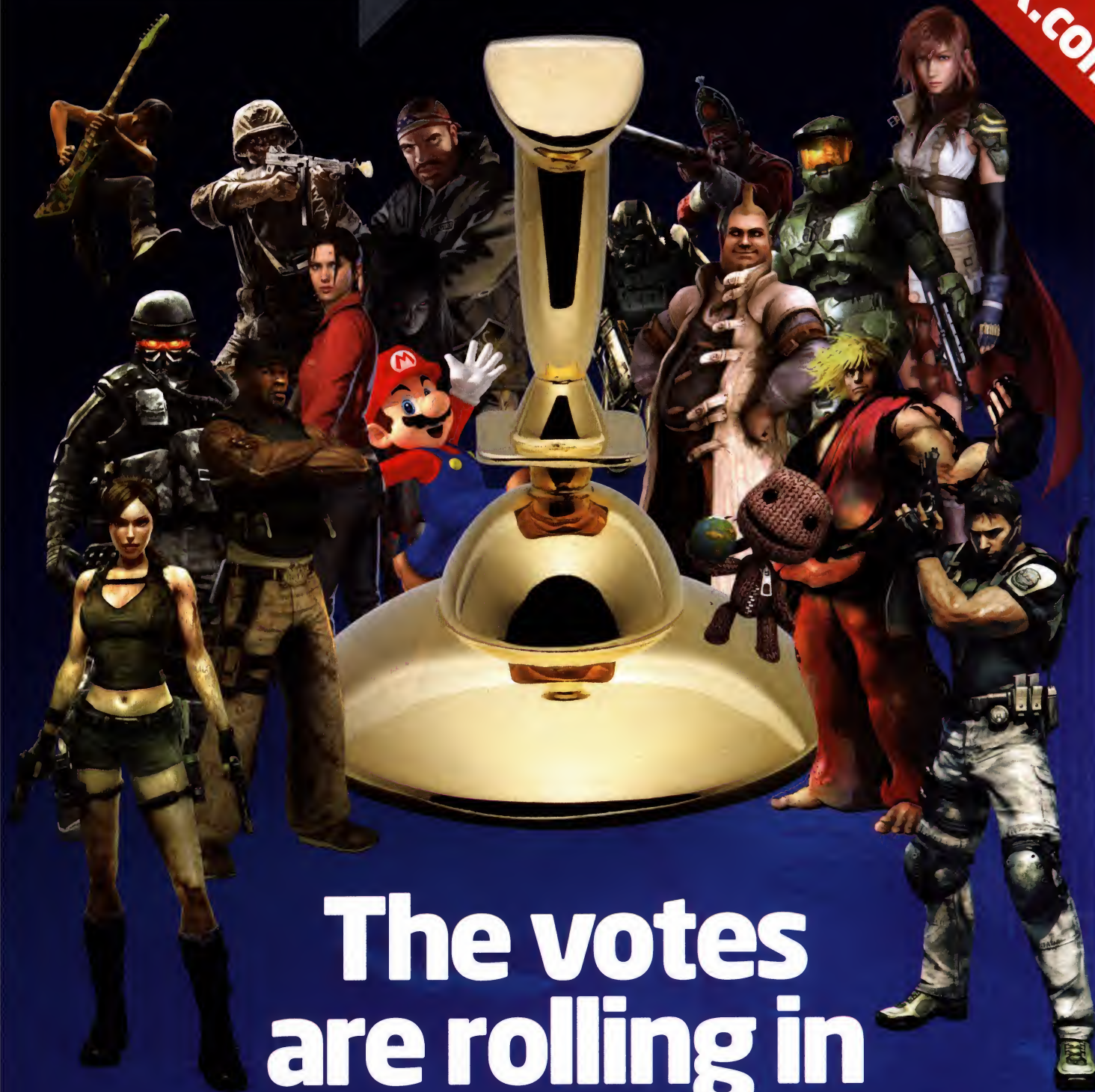
With this reunion on its hands, Rocksteady have guaranteed entertainment on one level, and it's great that they've delivered a gaming experience to match the subject. "We really want to deliver a good *Batman* game," says Hill. "If for no other reason than the world deserves one." At that point, I propose marriage, and we're currently living together in a castle made out of Milky Way Buttons. **PC7**

THERE'S A TIME AND A PLACE FOR LISTENING TO KILLER CROC THREATEN HIS NURSES



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**PCZONE**

Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

RETRO BATS

T HERE WAS A *Batman* game on the Atari ST which came out sometime around 1990, just at the time I was getting to grips with speaking, walking and not shitting myself. I clearly remember that because we "foxcopied" every game we owned, Batman's face would turn into bombs at one point (the Atari's unique way of crashing). It always crashed right before the level that let you fly the Batwing. The cruellest timing.

Now, desperate to replay a working copy of this game, I can't find the thing – it's been wiped from history. There were *Batman* games on the Atari ST, but none of them are the ones I'm thinking of. And now that we've arrived at the latest *Batman* outing with *Arkham Asylum*, I fear that nothing could be as amazing as the *Batman* game that now exists only in my head.

Let me know if you figure out what *Batman* game that was, in the meantime: hey, a reviews section!

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

MUST BUYS!

PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead GTA4

56

THE SIMS 3

The virtual people are back in your PC. Will it be the last gasp for the franchise, or another smash hit for EA?

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC
(90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



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PCZONE SWEARS...

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk



The SIMSTM 3

Will *Ali Wood* play with her virtual people's lives in true *PC ZONE* style?
Read on to find out...

"Don't hate me - I like subversion as much as the next relentless optimist - but I got completely sucked in"



Barry celebrates as Betty spontaneously combusts.



DEVELOPER The Sims Studio
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims3.com
ETA 5 June
PRICE £39.99

I'VE GOT A confession to make. I've never played *The Sims* on the PC before. I played *The Sims Bustin' Out* on the Nokia N-Gage, but that eventually annoyed me. At first I liked whizzing around on my little yellow moped, and it certainly helped pass the six hours I was stuck in the car park after Glastonbury one year.

But after a while I got bored: I couldn't make friends (nothing I said would do) and my house kept getting burgled. So I put *Busted Out* away, and haven't touched it since. Then *The Sims 3* arrived in the office and as Steve Hill was in a casino somewhere I thought "Why the heck not?" and took it for myself.

I'd been briefed about the hateful expansion packs and PCZ's general dislike for *The Sims*, but having read the previous games' reviews, I knew that they'd scored well. I was also told about

little experiments the team have done in the past (like building a maze with a toilet in the middle, or a long corridor with lots of doors and a toilet at the end, and timing how long it would take a sim to find it). Despite knowing what was expected from me, I ended up being sidetracked. Don't hate me - I like a bit of subversion as much as the next relentless optimist - but I got

completely sucked into *The Sims 3*.

The game started off with choosing a neighbourhood to live in - although the only one available when I played was Sunset Valley. Actually, it wasn't even a full neighbourhood - just half of one. After the game's launched, players will get access to the other neighbourhoods and the rest of the Valley. But for this test, I couldn't go and explore the other areas, and EA weren't saying what they were like.

But this is good news. As EA aren't using the hated SecuROM DRM for this release; instead they're trying to encourage people to play legit copies by giving honest folk more content. It's a similar approach to fighting piracy as Stardock took with *Sins of a Solar*

Empire - treating pirated copies of *The Sims 3* as demos of the full game. The bad news is that you can only register the game online. So EA can expect to see a great deal of justified bitching about that on the internet.

The Sims 3 begins with you making your first sim. My first attempt hit a setback when a miss-click meant I ended up back at the



AT A GLANCE...

The third of the core *Sims* games takes the long-running series to new heights, as it simulates life in the most realistic way ever.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2GHz Pentium 4 (2.4GHz *Vista*), 1GB RAM (1.5GB *Vista*), and a GeForce FX 5900/Radeon 9500 video card. Internet connection require for registration.

HOW IT STACKS

THE SIMS 3 92%

THE SIMS 86%

THE SIMS 2 82%

beginning of the process. In my second attempt I got as far as choosing a house and furnishing it when boredom and frustration overtook me – patience isn't one of my strong points, and designing a sim and their home from scratch requires that virtue in abundance.

Up to this point, *The Sims* failed to impress: Simlish – the made-up language the sims babble in – was irritating to my ears and I couldn't figure out how to put my sofa in the place I wanted to, as the placement system is just plain awkward. In short *The Sims* was annoying the hell out of me.

HERE WE GO

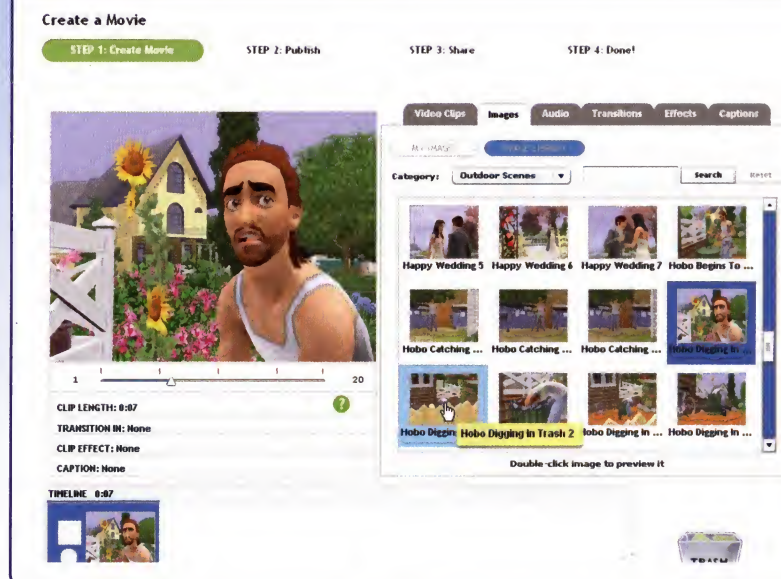
But, remembering I was a professional games journo, I breathed deep, started from scratch and created two sims: Betty and Barry Test.

This time round, creating the sims was easy. You can choose everything from the sex, age (from a baby to a pensioner), skin tone, body shape (weight and muscle tone, but not height), to the shape of the face, and whether you'd like your sim to have freckles or even face art.

There are different make-up styles to choose from – although the colours are a little odd. As there are plenty of eyeliner designs, Betty became an emo punk, complete with Tank Girl hair. With this in mind, while most of the female clothes were drab (don't get me started on the shoes!) I went for a fetching fishnet crop top, black jeans, boots, a red leather wrist thingie, and finished it off with some fingerless leather gloves which caught my eye. You can also pick other

MACHINIMA MACHINATIONS

Make your own porn with *The Sims* (maybe)



Die-hard *Sims* fans are renowned for painstakingly recreating movies in the game with third-party technology – someone has even recreated the finale to *High School Musical 3* (snipurl.com/simshsm3). In a nod to this, a major new feature of *The Sims 3* is Movie Mashup, which works in a similar way to *Windows Movie Maker*.

This feature allows you to make a movie of up to 10 minutes long from sequences in your sims' world, edit them together, and add music, effects and captions to them.

These machinima can then be shared across social networking sites or kept private. And it's all really easy peasy.

outfits for different times of the day, but I couldn't be arsed picking out more clothes, having already spent over 30 minutes working out Betty's look.

After creating your sim, you can choose up to five traits to define their personality. There were 62 to pick from, but EA said more will be available when the game goes live. For Betty, I chose Commitment Issues, Evil, Flirty, Kleptomaniac and Party Animal.

Each trait has a Lifetime Wish associated with it, from which you choose one for your sim. The messed-up

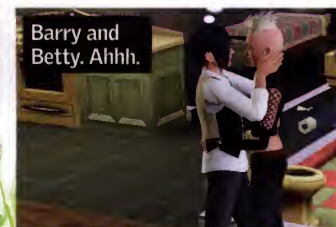
Sharing a home with eight women would be a living nightmare.



Babs shows off her spanner spinning skills to Becky #2.



Barry and Betty. Ahhh.



The pixellated toilet stop.



Betty could get Become A Master Thief, Gold Digger, Heartbreaker, The Emperor Of Evil (that really should have been "Empress", unless a sex change was part of her desire), and Jack Of All Trades. I settled on Become A Master Thief.

WISH FULFILMENT

As you play more wishes will crop up that run alongside the Lifetime Wish. Fulfilling these minor wishes, or the goals that lead to your Lifetime Wish being attained, gives you Rewards Points which allow you to buy unlockables. That's right: *The Sims 3* is not a refuge from achievements. After a decent amount of time in the game I was chuffed to have accrued enough points to give Barry a highly coveted Steel Bladder!

Barry, incidentally, was another emo as I'd slapped some eyeliner on him too. Sorry about that chaps, but he did look cool. During the make-up stage your sims' faces can be altered, which of course lead to experiments like placing unusually large noses on a small faces, or BFG-sized ears. However tempting that was, Barry was left with a standard-sized facial features.

The choice of clothes is better for the blokes – there's even a smoking jacket – but in keeping with the depressed rocker style, I went for a white shirt with waistcoat, skinny jeans, white pointy shoes and a red leather wrist thingie to match Betty's. Aah. Then came Barry's personality, with him getting a Good Sense Of Humour and Technophobia, and being a Natural Cook, Neat, and Lucky, with a lifetime wish of Five-Star Chef.

If this level of control isn't your cup of tea, you don't have to go through all that. There are pre-made sims available, and there's a random generator which can bring up some pretty funny options.



The repo man fires out some of Sonic's gold rings.

Once Barry and Betty were ready to be dumped in their home, the option to "Play With Genetics" appeared. This creates a blend of two sims to create another sim. Whether this creation is a realistic offspring or a mad scientist's experiment is down to you.

The final stages involved settling on Betty and Barry's relationship (husband and wife) and setting their life span (I chose a fairly tame 25 in-game days).

Once the actual game began you're given enough money to buy a decent house. You have the option to build one and furnish and decorate it yourself, or save some time and get fully furnished home. Buying the furnished option cuts down on the irritating pseudo-tutorial tasks that crop up like "buy a sofa", and cuts out the need to do some building. However, a bought house can be altered using the Buy Mode. So the Test's pre-made home at 55 Water Lily Lane got a new fridge that kept food fresh for longer, and a shoddy extension to the



Animal print heaven.

bedroom. As I didn't decorate straight away, the Tests got very snippy. Bloody emos always have to whine about something it seems...

As with the previous games, there's loads of stuff that can be added to your sims' home and garden: pools, walls, arches, plants, ponds, columns and fences, to keep them happy. So Betty and Barry ended up with a nice animal print bedroom and matching bathroom.

HAPPY DAYS

Once the house was ready, it was time the loving couple got a job. Betty ended up at the Police Department (I thought it might help her achieve her lifetime wish of becoming a master thief) and Barry in Hogan's Deep Fried Diner (again to help with that lifetime wish). Finding work was mindlessly simple – simply click on the Map View and selecting "Jobs" let you see what was available for each of your sims. The better the sims did at work, the more money they earned.



The floor was so comfy.

Employment-related challenges also cropped up from time to time, meaning they could earn even more lifetime reward points.

At first I did everything I could to keep my sims contented, which I would have happily done all day, every day instead of my real life. Hours passed away as I put my little emos to bed, got them to work on time, and made sure they were well fed and washed, and kept their house tidy.

It turned out that the sims' traits affected how they did this: as Betty had the Evil trait, she'd take an Evil Sleep – fidgeting so much Barry would wake up so often, he'd sleep in the spare room – and an Evil Bath – Barry was never around for this, so I'm still waiting to know how she bathed evilly. Maybe she didn't rinse out the bath, or used all the hot water. Time can now be accelerated to four different speeds, so you won't be left tapping your fingers while your sims laze in the bath, 



The pixellated shower stop is also back.

"I was chuffed to have accrued enough points to give Barry a highly coveted Steel Bladder!"

REVIEWSTHESIMS3



Barry takes a bath, trying not to get his hair wet.



This is just funny.

or are out at work. Unless that appeals to the *Big Brother* fan in you.

I also took the Tests to sports games, made them read books, learn to cook, held a couple of parties and tried for a baby (which was hilarious). Whenever I attempted something for the first time, a helpful Lesson pop-up appeared asking if I wanted to learn more about what I was about to do. The Lessons offered the option of being ran immediately, delayed for another time, or cancelled for good. The Lessons are also accessible through the Options menu, but the gameplay is easy to pick up without using them – even for complete newbies.

Skipping along through Sunset Valley, the attention to detail was impressive – when a sim takes something off the cooker, you see a little blue flame on the hob – and facial expressions related to the mood my sim was in, or what they were doing. I found I could follow my sims when they were travelling around in a cab, and I could make them get fat by forcing them to eat when they weren't hungry.

There were little things that also amused me: when I opted to Try For A Baby, Barry and Betty slipped under their bedcovers and pink and red hearts fluttered from mid-air to the bed; and

when my sims didn't take a shower for a few days a green vapour began to follow them around!

All in all, I was having a very pleasant time, and pleased to have left Hill to his sinful gambling habit.

TIME TO GET REAL

So, as I was clearly enjoying myself a bit too much, I decided to shake things up.

I'm not a big fan of making friends in real life so I created as many sims as possible (eight), made them all identical, and stuck them in one house to see what happened.

There was Betty #2, Babs, Bev, Binny, Bella, Becky, Beatrice and Bob, and I

gave them all identical cow-print cowboy hats, purple jeans and leopard print tops. Being in a house full of this many women – let alone clones – is pretty much my idea of a living hell.

Sorry guys, there are no sexy slow-motion pillow fights in this all-girl house. Instead the ladies roamed their dirty house hunting for something other than birthday cake to eat. Nothing in the bathroom worked and water spilled everywhere, so they all stank. And as they only had two beds most of them passed out where they stood when they were tired, unless they were lucky enough to get a place on the couch to have a nap. Betty #2 was so exhausted

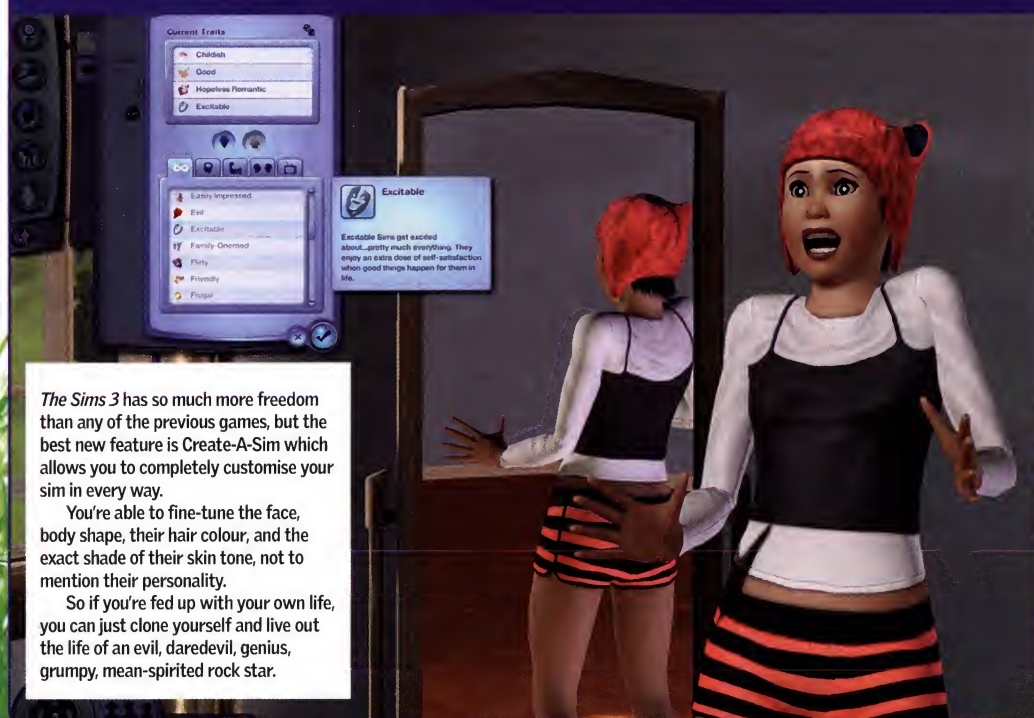
at one point that she just collapsed in the corridor, while her sorority sisters simply stepped over her.

Eventually most didn't even bother to dress in their daytime outfits, preferring instead to run around in their nighties or, in Babs' case, her swimsuit. You see she was a Never Nude – no matter whether she's in the shower or on the toilet, she always remains clothed. In gameplay terms this makes no difference, because, like in previous games, nude or semi-nude sims are always pixellated out.

Back to the house share from hell – the worst times were at night when there were six bed-less girls trying to fight off hunger and sleep. However, they were a resilient bunch (mostly) and kept themselves amused by futilely cleaning, rummaging through bins (Babs did this for hours) or staring at plants (when things got too much for Betty #2, she'd run to her plant and look at it for a bit).

CREATIVE CAMP

Make the world of the sims just like yours



The Sims 3 has so much more freedom than any of the previous games, but the best new feature is Create-A-Sim which allows you to completely customise your sim in every way.

You're able to fine-tune the face, body shape, their hair colour, and the exact shade of their skin tone, not to mention their personality.

So if you're fed up with your own life, you can just clone yourself and live out the life of an evil, daredevil, genius, grumpy, mean-spirited rock star.

SIMS IN NEED

Depriving your sims of their basic needs, brings out the worst in them



BIN LADY

With eight women living in the house, none of whom were inclined to cook, Babs took to rummaging around in the bin outside, looking for food. Or possibly just to pass the time...



DIRTY LADY

One night Babs literally spent hours searching through the trash cans – in her swimming cossie too. She looked up every now and again, seemingly worried she would get caught.



HUNGRY LADY

After waking up having successfully nabbing a bed (and sleeping fully clothed) the previous night, Bev was so hungry she was horrified by it, clutching her poor empty stomach.

At one point two of the girls vanished. Portraits of active sims are listed along the side of the screen, and given a clue to their health – green means they're OK, red means dead. When I noticed that Bev and Binny's pictures were red I clicked on their portraits, which caused the camera to move to them. Or in these cases, a cliff. Or rather, the sea beneath it. It seemed their life had been too much for these ladies, and they'd decided to end it all by throwing themselves to their deaths. I felt so bad, I called in the repair technician to fix the bathroom.

While playing *The Sims 3* this way was funny for a bit, I didn't enjoy it. I'm a homebody at heart and to see my sims suffering felt like I was putting a hamster in a ball and letting him run round and

round and round. Then opening the ball and throwing in some drawing pins before forcing him to run round and round and round again. But it reiterated what makes *The Sims 3* great: you can play it any way you like – with the benevolence of an angel or the sadism of a Guantanamo Bay interrogator.

One of the biggest changes between *The Sims 3* and *Sims 2* games is that you're no longer restricted to your sims' lot. Your virtual people can roam their suburb and visit the neighbours. No more waiting for your friends to come over, now you can go to them.

Other updates make a big difference: compared to *The Sims 2* loading times are much faster, the camera is easier to control, and the interface is ridiculously

easy to get to grips with and neater – your sims' Needs are tucked away on the Sims Panel along with their Simology (basic info), Relationships, Career, Skills, Inventory, Opportunities and Lifetime Happiness.

The Tests ignore their unfinished extension.



Betty liked nothing better than reading in the graveyard.



"I've lost so many hours to *The Sims 3* the PCZ team were convinced they'd have to surgically remove my mouse from my hand"

These improvements over the previous game, nailed it – I became absolutely besotted. I've lost so many hours to *The Sims 3* the PCZ team were convinced they'd have to surgically remove my mouse from my hand to get me to work.

But while the game is enjoyable and addictive, it's bit too American. I really want a British version, where you can live on a *Shameless*-style council estate; where there's football pitches instead of stadiums; pubs instead of bars; cafes instead of diners. That and a Topshop to buy some decent clobber.

With hindsight my initial annoyance with *The Sims 3* wasn't a fault with the game, but down to it offering so much freedom. Before I could enjoy it I had to work out what I wanted to do (have one sim or many? Build a house or go with the pre-built?) and what play style suited me (be nice or nasty?).

So play the game the way you like, and treat it as a guilty pleasure. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Sharp
SOUND Customisable
MULTIPLAYER Still none

- ✓ Pure and simple fun
- ✓ Addictive
- ✓ Likeable characters
- ✓ Humorous
- ✓ Hours of gameplay
- ✗ Addictive

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Sim-ply the best



COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR

"Should I be enjoying war this much?" asks *Laurence Elliott*

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE companyofheroes
game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £1799

REVOLUTION HAS BEEN the word on everyone's lips when it comes to Relic's wartime poster child. *Company of Heroes* streamlined the real-time strategy experience by taking out all the naff or boring bits to create an arcadey, action driven title that was rightly hailed as a benchmark for its genre. All the more sympathy then for Relic, who have given themselves a monumentally difficult act to follow and some pretty tough choices to make as to where they should go next: keep the same magic formula and risk stagnation, or make too many changes and lose what made *COH* a success. What they've produced is actually a fairly decent instalment in the franchise, but an ultimately dumbed down experience.

In fact, "instalment" might be pushing it a little since there isn't an awful lot in the way of new content here. The campaigns consist of a paltry three missions a piece, and each will take you no longer than a couple of hours to complete. That being said, this is still *Company of Heroes*, and in spite of the woefully short single-player it's still the

pinnacle of WWII strategy, and merit has to be given to Relic for riskily attempting to renovate a part of the genre increasingly lacking in any real sparks of originality.

Much like *Dawn of War II* and *World in Conflict*, *Tales of Valor* takes the less-is-more approach to real-time strategy warfare, with battles being strictly small-scale and players being in control of only a handful of men. The result is an interesting blend of action

and RTS, with a few RPG elements thrown in for good measure.

Relic's centrepiece for this scaling down philosophy is the first new campaign in the expansion. *Tiger Ace* sees you taking control of a single German Tiger Tank crew, rampaging through the streets of Villers-Bocage. That's right: no resource management, no buildings and no unit production. This really does mean that there's little involved strategy, no discernible sense of

AT A GLANCE...

Three new campaigns and three new multiplayer modes feature in the new standalone expansion for the acclaimed strategy franchise.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card or better.

HOW IT STACKS

**COMPANY OF HEROES:
OPPOSING FRONTS** 82%

**WARHAMMER 40,000:
DAWN OF WAR II** 78%

**COMPANY OF HEROES:
TALES OF VALOR** 76%



DIRECT FIRE MODE

You'll shoot when I tell you to shoot damn it!

Although a simpleton like me might not find *Company of Heroes'* new way of killing things particularly useful, this is something I'm sure higher level players may well exploit to every possible advantage in multiplayer.

I can only imagine it being beneficial when controlling a tank, however, as you can have a greater degree of control over which direction it is facing (and therefore which side of the hull takes damage) when shooting something behind or to the side, providing a partial resolution to the frustrating tank pathing issues that both *Dawn of War II* and *COH* have been dogged with.

The other upshot is that you can indiscriminately destroy the surrounding scenery as much as you want, even if there are no enemies in sight, and indulging one's pernicious side is always fun.



The best thing about tanks? You never have trouble parking.



difficulty and so, to be honest, not a whole lot of fun. Relishing in the glorious and gratuitous destruction that the Havok engine allows you to inflict on the poor French countryside will of course never get old and so visually, *Tales of Valor* delivers the timeless *COH* magic that we have all come to love.

The new campaigns also introduce Direct Fire, a new real-time aiming mode that allows you to use your mouse to aim and fire your turret or squad manually. This is only useful on occasion, and it's difficult to shake the gimmickiness of it, especially when pointing and clicking will get the job done most of the time.

As mildly amusing but ultimately unfulfilling as the additions to the single-player are, it would be unfair to focus on them too heavily as this is undoubtedly

a multiplayer expansion. The three new campaigns don't really add anything spectacular to the series in the same way that *Opposing Front's* single-player did. However, the new multiplayer modes on the other hand are a stroke of Relic-flavoured genius.

WORLD WAR FUN

Although strategy purists or hard-line *COH* veterans may turn their noses up at what are essentially game modes with a greater focus on arcade and immersive action rather than realistic or gritty strategy, they're nevertheless incredibly original, diverse and breathe new life into Relic's pride and joy, which until now was beginning to show signs of age.

In Assault mode, you're put in control of a single character from a choice of

seven different character classes, each with their own individual abilities (the officer can boost morale, the sniper deals huge damage to single targets, the medic heals nearby allies and so on). The rest of the army is controlled by the AI and the ultimate objective is to push your way into the enemy's base and destroy their central HQ, upgrading your hero unit's three different attributes as you progress further and rack up kills. This kind of gameplay might seem to have more RPG and action elements than RTS, but speaking as someone who has squeezed every possible drop of enjoyment out of most of Relic's titles, it is an incredibly refreshing change from the classic format.

Whether such changes will alienate or entice remains to be seen, but nevertheless Relic have produced an upstanding addition to the definitive WWII strategy series. Whether there's enough here to warrant its position as a standalone release is debatable – surely in this golden age of DLC such plays will be viewed in a more cynical light – but the originality of the new multiplayer modes can't be faulted.

Relic seem to fancy themselves the mad scientists of the WWII RTS field, constantly experimenting and tinkering with the genre's formula with the aim to produce something new, and inarguably original. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Stunningly detailed
SOUND Immersive and realistic
MULTIPLAYER Incredible variety of different game types

- ✓ Multiplayer modes are very original
- ✓ Engaging and exciting battles
- ✗ Single-player too short
- ✗ Less strategy than before

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In good company

"The new multiplayer modes are a stroke of Relic-flavoured genius"



BRAID

While running in reverse *Steve Hogarty* makes "fwah, fwah" noises

DEVELOPER Number None
PUBLISHER Number None
WEBSITE braid-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99



AT A GLANCE...

A game derided for being an over-hyped and hellishly pretentious platformer turns out to be every bit as brilliant as it was supposed to be.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 1.4GHz processor, 768MB RAM, and a DirectX 9-compatible video card.

HOW IT STACKS

BRAID 90%

PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME 84%

PACMAN: ADVENTURES IN TIME 60%

UTTER GENIUS. THIS game strikes a perfect balance between challenge and reward, between gleefully obtuse objectives and maddeningly distant solutions. *Braid* is platform puzzler with each of its six worlds each offering a clever time-manipulating ability.

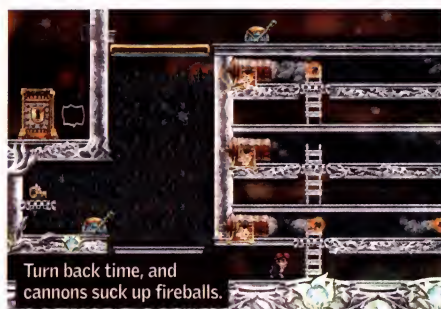
The first is built upon in every other world: the ability to rewind time and undo your mistakes. After that, each new venue brings with it a chronological plaything, cordially introducing its mechanics before stretching them to their logical extremes.

Take world four, for example. In this world, moving to the right causes time to flow forwards. Move to the left and time

flows backwards. As unmanageable a concept as that sounds, it quickly becomes a reasonable and workable construction, as the analogy of the level as a timeline gently dawns on you. Put a smidge more simply: when you stand at a particular point in space, you're also unavoidably standing in a corresponding point in time. In practice, you won't be able to jump on the little goomba people and collect the jigsaw piece until you adjust their personal timelines using the environment around you.

Later worlds are easier to explain. One has you dropping a time-distorting ring, which slows time more for objects and enemies closer to it than those further away. Another features a shadow version of your character, who, after you've rewound time, replays the actions you've previously carried out in the then future.

With ample time to dick about with these abilities, the basic mechanics are straightforward – more so than they appear on paper. In one instance, having solved one of the later



puzzles, I turned to a colleague giddily and pointed at the screen shouting "look, it's got causality!" It really does have causality in one bit, which I won't ruin for you. A potential first in gaming. On this timeline at least.

WATCHMEN

Braid's a starkly beautiful game too, both visually and aurally. The sounds and animations are built to scale with the contraction and expansion of time. Your character, Tim, is hand drawn in excruciating detail in anticipation of being viewed running at a snail's pace. The various, drum-led scores can be drawn out to the point of surreal, otherworldly bass-scapes, or sped up to the point of sounding like some ketamine-fuelled acid rave.

The previously mentioned world in which time only moves as you do begins in a silence; the music only rolling into life as you begin to run. Move backwards, and so does the music, first winding to a stop like a tired music box, before

MAKE YOUR OWN

Secret level editor included!

Scoot on over to snipurl.com/braideveled for full instructions on how to release *Braid's* hidden, sort-of-secret, level editing tools. Essentially it requires that you download some stuff before running *Braid* with the command line "-universe sample".

Even if you're not interested in creating your own time-bending

puzzles, you'll recognise the potential for a stream of user-created content having surfaced around the time you read this sentence. We're banking slightly on the ingenuity of *Braid's* fanbase, but check back with us in the next issue, where our Freeplay section will be rounding up the best extra maps money can't buy.

I'm sorry, but the Princess is in another castle.

SPACEBAR

Cloud machines.

Ladder japes.

Ring larks.

That's one nasty little bunny.



sucking up the notes in reverse. These levels employ traditional lullabies to back them, and the familiarity of the tune, met with the bleak soundlessness of standing still, creates a haunting atmosphere. Visual cues like falling leaves and snow leave you no doubt as to how the game world is acting at any given moment.

Any sense of frustration is tempered by the ability to reverse time, and then further still by the ability to outright ignore the puzzles. The overarching objective is to collect jigsaw pieces, with each world containing 12 increasingly

difficult to acquire pieces, but you're entirely free to move through the game collecting only the ones you can manage. Revisiting old worlds to pick up the remaining pieces and form the six jigsaws is the only way to unlock the game finale however – seemingly the only time the game will block your progress.

PLOT PLOPS

The plot is grossly pretentious nonsense. Grossly pretentious, skippable nonsense. Something about Tim trying to have sex with a princess, delivered through a series of verbose dialogue pop-ups preceding each world. It's slightly less audacious in context, the pastel graphics and soothing music transporting you to a place where it's perfectly acceptable for a platformer to have a plot more complex than stomping on a turtle's face, but there'll be a few occasions which will

make you want to punch developer Jonathan Blow right on the anus.

Braid is blindingly fantastic and Blow knows it, but he's also keen enough to realise the arena he's working in – the ignorability of all the peripheral gumph means it'll only have a bearing on your experience of *Braid* if you allow it to. And once you've realised that Blow's not shoving fistfuls of his failed screenplays down your gullet, you'll applaud the plot in all its ridiculous, interpretive glory.

This is then, in conclusion, perhaps the single greatest puzzle platformer you'll ever play, punting the standard for independently developed games into the stratosphere. *Braid* consistently skirts perfection, at times making you feel thick, and at times making you feel immeasurably clever. Its merits lie mostly in its classical qualities; those of a solid platformer built around original puzzles, which themselves follow a perfectly hewn difficulty curve. The plot whiffs of arse, sure, but everything else here is unfalteringly genius. **PCZ**



PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lovely hand-drawn sprites
SOUND Celtic, Eastern and Romanesca, it's all good
MULTIPLAYER No

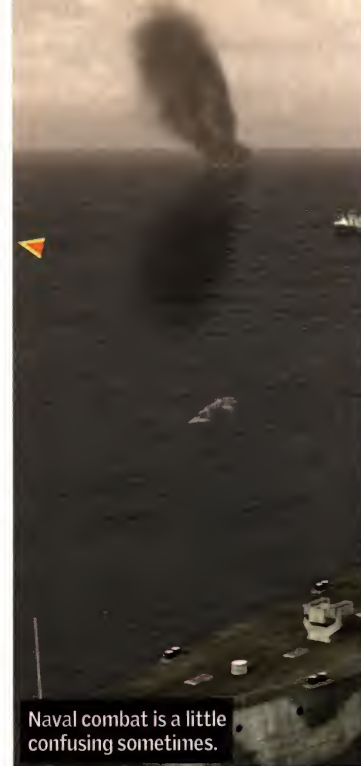
- ✓ Genuinely clever stuff
- ✓ Perfectly balanced puzzles
- ✓ Looks great
- ✓ Sounds great
- ✗ Has its head up its arse

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Timely



Use a bomber's turret to defend against fighters.



Naval combat is a little confusing sometimes.

BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC

Adam Glick has been known to drop a depth-charge or two in his time

DEVELOPER Eidos Hungary
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.battlestations.net
ETA 15 May
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Arcade war game where you can take control of virtually any unit in the key battles of World War II's Pacific theatre.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 3GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 256MB graphics card.
Games for Windows LIVE! required for multiplayer.

HOW IT STACKS

BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC 72%

H.A.W.X. 70%

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY 68%

DUE TO THE arcade nature of its combat and presentation, *Battlestations: Pacific* screams "average!" at you from the off. While it's tempting to dismiss it as a bland arcade fly-fly bang-bang game, this would be doing it a great disservice. It falls between that particular stool and the one marked "Incomprehensible PC simulation". So, while it does appeal to adrenaline whores, it also has a deal of depth to it that will surprise many.

Set in the Pacific theatre of World War II, the game is nothing if not ambitious. It allows you to control

planes, boats, short-mounted artillery and flak cannons and submarines.

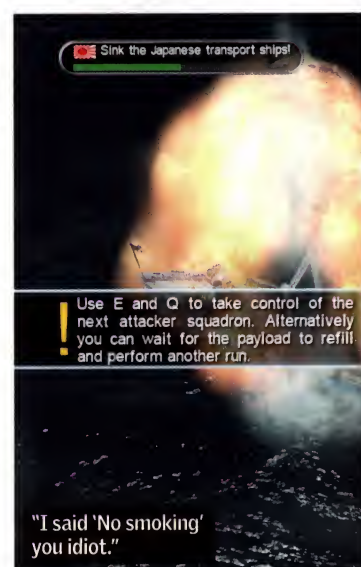
You can dive straight into the action yourself, dive-bombing dreadnoughts and carriers, or take a step back and issue commands either in-cockpit or using a relatively clumsy tactical map. With over 100 air, sea and undersea units to unlock there's plenty for the obsessive to aim for.

The meat of the offline game is in the two campaigns, one featuring the usual US post-Midway missions, and the other allowing you to fight for the Japanese forces, perhaps screaming "For the Emperor!" and "You build bridge now!" at the top of your lungs.

Each campaign is set up with a particularly rousing (and long) cinematic, before you head into each mission, which could involve bombing the US troops at Pearl Harbour or eliminating waves of Japanese Zeroes as they attack your bombers.



Dogfighting is good fun.



"I said 'No smoking' you idiot."

However, perhaps the most intriguing thing about the game is the great potential the multiplayer has. Eidos Hungary have provided numerous different modes that cover all the material within the game, including Island Capture, Domination and Escort. All of this sounds like great fun, but the arcade nature of many aspects of the gameplay, and the very fact that there are so many different facets to it all, makes the whole slightly less than the sum of its parts. While each individual element is fun, there's almost too much to consider at any one time, especially on the Island Capture multiplayer mode.

NAVAL CONFUSION

Controlling the battleships is perhaps the weakest of all these modes, with not enough feedback coming from your broadsides to know whether you've done any damage or not. This is actually a problem in other areas too, where



WORLD AT WAR

Battlestations: Pacific's cutscenes make a big impression

One thing we were struck by during our time on *Battlestations: Pacific* was the epic nature of the cutscenes, not just in terms of their content, but also because they were long. Not *Metal Gear Solid 4* long, but still, for an arcade-style war game, relatively lengthy.

What they succeed in doing is stirring your loins for the fight ahead, filling the screen with images of dogfighting planes, exploding battleships, herded POWs and, finally, a fluttering flag.

Similar clips intersperse the campaign missions, but aren't anywhere near as long. You'll probably end up skipping these, as they aren't as good.



"Smoke me a kipper..."

they don't help the information stick well enough. Trial and error seems to be the best way to progress.

NOT ALL FIXED

This leads me onto one last major point: while this is definitely better than the original game (*Battlestations: Midway*, PCZ 179, 68%) it has some of the same problems plaguing it.

As mentioned above, an apparent easy-to-use console interface segues into "what the...?" control schemes, not helped by the poor tutorial elements. Thankfully, ships can now be repaired during battle, so that's one old problem

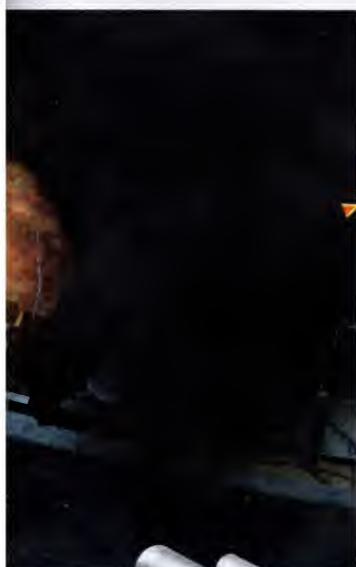
that has been fixed. This sequel's design seems to be a mix – some bad things remain, while others have been scrubbed away.

Still, for those looking for a flying game (primarily) that's just about fun, but that also has more depth than, say, *H.A.W.X.*, *Battlestations: Pacific* is a decent bet. While it might have some problems, there's plenty of interesting elements to get stuck into, and, if the multiplayer can take off (no pun intended) Eidos might be onto a winner, though one that could be more likely to succeed on the dreaded consoles. It has nice fluffy clouds too. **PCZ**

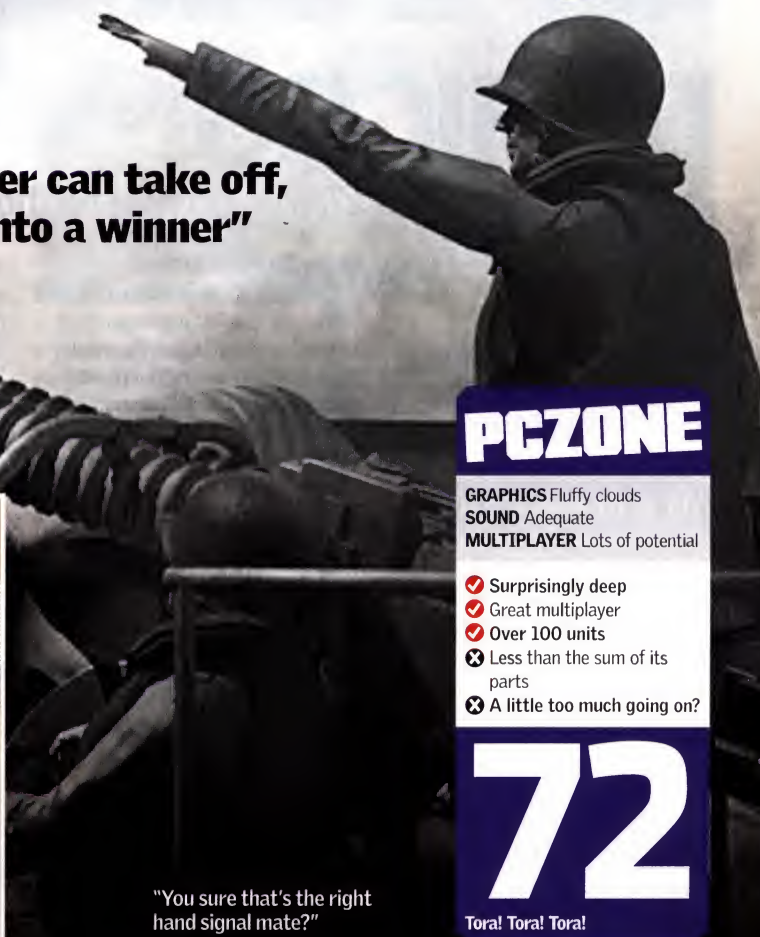
there's so much going on it can be difficult to accurately determine what you are doing, in comparison to your squad mates. There were even a couple of occasions where my swine allies stole my kills, which just isn't cricket, lads!

There's also the issue of in-game help being slightly confusing and badly presented. I don't know if it is just me, but I find it essential nowadays (due to a new-found laziness) for a relatively complicated game to have a spoken tutorial or help section. While *Battlestations* does have ample help prompts (some that can be intrusively annoying, in fact) and training videos,

"If the multiplayer can take off, Eidos might be onto a winner"



"Banzai."



"You sure that's the right hand signal mate?"

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Fluffy clouds
SOUND Adequate
MULTIPLAYER Lots of potential

- ✓ Surprisingly deep
- ✓ Great multiplayer
- ✓ Over 100 units
- ✗ Less than the sum of its parts
- ✗ A little too much going on?

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Tora! Tora! Tora!



DEMIGOD

God won't save *Ed Zitron*, no matter how hard he prays

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER Stardock
WEBSITE demigodthegame.com
ETA 31 May
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

An RTS/RPG hybrid based on a *Warcraft III* map where you control heroes with a different abilities and smash up other semi-dieties.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

3GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a video card with 256MB RAM with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR 94%

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS 85%

DEMIGOD 68%

THERE ARE FEW games officially endorsed by a Swedish pop star, but eagle-eyed fans out there may know that Basshunter wrote an entire song about playing *Demigod*. Well not this *Demigod*, but its father, the map/mod for *Warcraft III: Defence of the Ancients*. In much the same way as *DOTA*, *Demigod* has you take control of a central hero (in this case a demigod) to do battle with the other demigods to seize control of the pantheon and take the place of the Allfather, who just died.

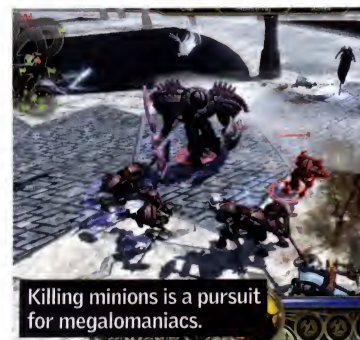


Sadly, that sentence of storyline came solely from the website, and *Demigod* itself is almost totally bereft of story or lore. This is even more disappointing when you take a look at some of the cooler characters – like The Rook, a gigantic walking castle with a hammer – and wonder where they came from. I hate to set the tone for *Demigod* so negatively, but it lacks a satisfying core – what you see, is what you get.

The demigod that you choose is tied to a specific (and generic) path. They range from the aforementioned Rook – a

heavily armoured and deadly, but understandably slow melee diety – and others, like the Oak who can protect allies and raise dead units as spirits.

Each game is centred around a map with several different flags that must be held by your forces. As you fight through them you gain gold and experience, the latter



of which can be spent in a *Diablo*-style skill tree, levelling up skills over the course of the map. Experience is earned by completing objectives which involve either killing rival demigods and their minions, destroying buildings, or capturing flags.

BAD BALANCE

The crux is that you only control your demigod, and the AI-controlled minions spill forth from portals that are part of the map's objectives. Control these portals and you can effectively overwhelm the enemy, which is particularly good for winning fortress games. However, if you control a lot of gold mines, you can equip the demigods on your side with power artifacts that, by



and large, give rather unfair advantages if used correctly. You can even control points that give large boons to your experience, which in part makes the game a great deal more exciting.

You see, one of the largest problems with *Demigod* is the pacing. The first five or so minutes of any match starting characters at level 1 are the duller in gaming history. Until you reach level 10, your character isn't much more complex than *Red Alert's* Tanya. Past that, games become less about tactics and more about button-mashing abilities, a kind of low-fi version of *World of Warcraft's* PvP. While there's room for tactical play (for example, the Unclean Beast can blow up several minions at once, causing massive damage at later levels) too much of the game is either a giant bundle or trying to walk towards a giant bundle.

This counts for both online and the God-awful single-player campaign which is nothing but a selection of skirmish

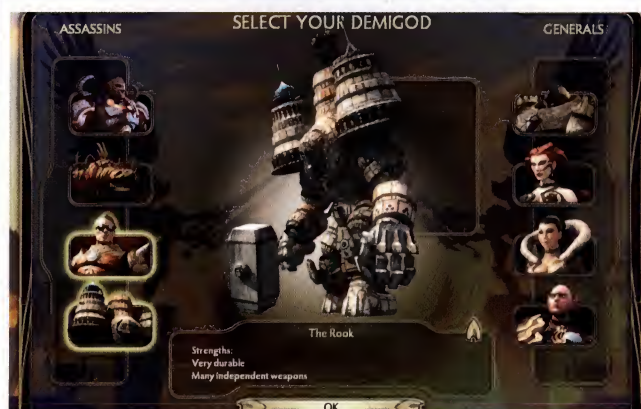
maps and a so-called tournament, which is just a series of skirmish maps in a row. Even once you become adept at the game, bad players on either side can make any match a bore. Too hard, and you'll find yourself steam-rolled in a maelstrom of clipped NPCs and spells, too easy and your game's over before you can pass level 8.

IT'S NOT TETLEY

This is where a core to the game would have helped. The big selling point has been The Pantheon – a “persistent online world” which boils down to playing the same maps again and again to gain favour points. These points carry over between games, and you can use them for somewhat dull and ineffectual rewards. The light or the darkness can win, and that's about it. There's no goal, no point, no story, no real thrust to keep going once you've exhausted all of the maps. They're not even big enough to

DEMIGOD SELECTION

The differences between the Pantheon's avatars



While all the demigods are warriors they're split between Assassins, solo fighters who wade into the melee, and Generals who use troops or magic to attack while staying out of the fray. The Rook, an Assassin, summons groups of archers onto his mighty shoulders and has a big hammer, while the Queen of Thorns orders plant creatures to tear you apart. Meanwhile, Lord Erebus leeches life and causing damage from afar, and the Unclean Beast stuns, paralyzes and saps the life of any humanoid, up close, and has a primary attack that causes a staggering amount of damage. But without reliable people backing you, these intricacies are lost as you're run over by a rush of four other demigods.



have any real complexity, and by the time you round out your character through levelling, the game tends to be over.

This isn't to say *Demigod* is bad. It's a functional, relatively enjoyable RTS-RPG game, with a few hours of fun to squeeze out of it if you're willing to pass the growing pains. It's more akin to getting home to a lukewarm bath and the end of a pot of tea rather than an immensely satisfying conclusion. Those who enjoyed *DOTA* will like the graphical upgrades and some *WOW* PvPers may like that they have little or no control over the battle. For the rest of us, there's at most a few hours of fun to be had before you get worn down by the endless monotony. *Demigod* needed more maps, an actual single-player campaign, and a greater degree of character persistence to even compete with any of the other online RTS games out there. **PC!**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Crisp yet bland
SOUND Screaming noises and explosive magic
MULTIPLAYER The best bit

- ✓ Graphically interesting
- ✓ Impressive-looking maps
- ✗ Bad single-player
- ✗ Borderline uncontrollable battles
- ✗ Unreliably enjoyable experience

68
Not godly

"Demigod is akin to getting home to a lukewarm bath"



FLOCK!

Ed Zitron shoves sheep off the side of a cliff with malice

DEVELOPER Proper Games
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE motherflocker.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £10



AT A GLANCE...

Quirky puzzle game that has you herding sheep into a mothership for transport to an alien planet.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), and a 64MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

BLACK AND WHITE 95%

3D LEMMINGS 71%

FLOCK! 45%

A GAME THAT annoys me so much that I want to scream in a developer's face is a rarity, but Proper Games have managed to stoke the fires of my deepest ire.

Flock! has a simple concept. You control a flying saucer, and herd different animals, each with different characteristics, towards your craft – the 'Motherflocker'. The sheep, chickens, cows and pigs all move differently, and by scaring them into certain objects in the terrain, you can manipulate them.

This sounds as if it would be easy – even fun – but the UFO controls like treacle-dipped shit. Scaring animals is done by moving the saucer towards them, and they in turn try and run away. Your movement is painfully slow and unwieldy, lacking the disciplined and careful movement that a great many of the puzzles require of you very early on. Moving a large group of sheep along a

cliff edge becomes as boring and frustrating as it must be in real life. You'll be edging carefully towards them to make sure they don't run away, only to have one walk away from the craft and wander off. As you turn to bring him back, the rest get scared of the back of your craft and fall into the sea.

FLOCK OFF

Things only get worse as the physics begins to coax parts of your herd into unreachable parts of the level as they climb a hill, or you miss a catapult by inches and have to guide a slow cow up a hill to try it again.

Flock! consistently fails to be fun, funny or enjoyable. It smacks you in the face with blunt, obvious humour ("Flock" apparently sounds like a swear word), and the same repetitive B-movie bullshit that was only funny in *Mars Attacks!*. While it seeks to be a charming, quirky and intuitive game, *Flock!* comes off as an abrasive and distinctly wonky package.

Even using an Xbox 360 pad to gain you the tiniest shred of extra accuracy still fails to improve what is probably the most frustrating puzzler I've had the displeasure of ever playing. **PCZ**



PCZONE

GRAPHICS Bright and fuzzy
SOUND The same minute of song repeated

MULTIPLAYER Two-player co-op

- ✓ Level editor is a good idea
- ✓ Herding a good concept
- ✗ Frustrating controls
- ✗ Frustrating gameplay
- ✗ Smug and blatant humour

45
 Go flock yourself



PLANTS VS ZOMBIES

Steve Hogarty is a delicate flower

DEVELOPER PopCap
PUBLISHER PopCap
WEBSITE popcap.com/games/pvz
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99



AT A GLANCE...

PopCap's foray into tower defence games leads them, as ever to greatness. Everything they touch turns to gold, you know.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB of RAM,
and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PEGGLE 83%

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES 82%

PEGGLE NIGHTS 80%

AN ACCEPTABLE RESPONSE to brazenly self-asserting wackiness in a game's title is probably outright repulsion. *Stalin vs Martians*, *Robot Dinosaurs That Shoot Beams When They Roar* – your gut reaction is to groan and roll your eyes so hard that it hurts to blink. What's wrong with simply calling your game *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty?* Or *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II?*

Plants vs Zombies quickly kicks that cynicism. In its bleakest description it's a tile-based tower defence game in which zombies lurch from the right side of the screen to the left, while you place anthropomorphic plants to defend your lawn from the attack. It's cute, clean, wacky fun that for a while appears to be a throwaway, casual game from that timesink manufacturer PopCap.

Soon, as you could have guessed, it turns into cute, clean, wacky and

sinisterly addictive fun. The sedative effect of planting your units is alarming, and while the low-level strategy won't be found taxing in the slightest, the gentle, creeping introduction of new plants and new enemies provides compelling impetus to keep playing. In fact, every level introduces a new unit, eventually expanding your available plants to the point where choosing your leafy battlements is half the challenge.

WEED KILLERS

You're forewarned of the kinds of zombie you'll face in a level, from plain zombies, to zombies with bucket helmets, to zombies riding dolphins, to zombie bobsleigh teams, and dancing *Thriller* zombies. You're given no clue as to the secret hidden abilities of the newly discovered ambulatory corpses, instead you learn as you go, with your findings recorded in the curiously witty zombie almanac.

As you play, a secret mountain of mini-games and distractions piles up back at the menu screen, lying in wait for that moment where you think you're ready to leave the game. Zombie bowling, the glorious Zen Garden, and the one with the vases with zombies hidden inside them, they all prove to be

as heinously addictive as the main adventure is.

I've only felt this way about a game once before, and that was the first time I played *Peggle* – *Plants vs Zombies* is as simple an idea as PopCap could manage, and one whose system of rewarding the player for every moment they surrender is as refined as the *Half-Lives* and *Total Wars* of the world. **PCZ**



GRAPHICS Excellent, comic, and cutesy
SOUND No *Ode To Joy*, but jazzy
MULTIPLAYER A lonely oak

- ✓ Addictive
- ✓ Funny
- ✓ Balanced
- ✓ Rewarding
- ✗ Bit too easy





WHEELMAN

Laurence Elliott investigates a suspicious looking skidmark

DEVELOPER Midway Studios
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE wheelmangame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

AT A GLANCE...

Vin Diesel, Barcelona and the usual dollop of gratuitous action. Another rubbish GTA clone with a focus on arcade-style driving.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz Core Duo (2.4GHz Vista), 2GB RAM (3GB Vista), and a Geforce 7800GT or Radeon x1800XT or better.

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	91%
BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX	89%
WHEELMAN	37%

THERE MAY BE hope for us yet. Vin Diesel, officially the burliest man in Hollywood, is a bona fide gaming nerd. The gravel-mouthed beefcake shamelessly admits he is a videogame fanatic and has been playing them his whole life. Between crushing melons in his pecs and shooting lightning from his abs, he even manages to find the time to foster a *World of Warcraft* addiction. This appreciation of the medium almost makes it surprising that his latest movie/videogame tie-in is so woefully crap.

Given that this is a shameless attempt at emulating the open-world of *Grand Theft Auto IV* it does nothing that made Rockstar's title so enjoyable. The incredible attention to detail and engaging story that made you feel so connected to *GTA's* Liberty City is entirely absent in *Wheelman's* Barcelona. Every street and every pedestrian (none of which you can wantonly kill – for shame Mr Diesel) look near identical, and there are only a handful of different cars available to drive.

Originally a Vin Diesel movie tie-in, *Wheelman* is understandably going for a more cinematic action experience than

Rockstar's hit, and there are times when the game's over-the-top silver screen nonsense starts to become enjoyable. Physically impossible, but surprisingly satisfying, abilities like the cyclone (spinning the car 180° so you can shoot the enemies behind you in slow motion) can make you feel suitably badass.

The laughable AI, however, is so beset with such inane levels of abject cretinism that the enjoyment you get from pulling off these moves is short-lived. It's possible, for example, to go on a quasi-killing spree (remember you can't actually kill anyone you want), get as many police cars chasing you as possible and then just drive round and round in a fairly small circle, with the authorities seemingly incapable of doing anything to stop you.

WHEELY POOR

When you get out of the car, things get a whole lot worse. Ignoring the lack of a jump button or cover system (automatic or manual), aiming at enemies is unresponsive and wobbly, making it difficult to shoot even the explosive barrels that most of your enemies decide to huddle round in nearly every fire fight.

That a big-name star who's so passionate about gaming has put his name to such a poor title is a shame, especially since *The Chronicles of Riddick* games were such a resounding success. This formula of cheesy dialogue, tenuous plot and gratuitous explosions was enough to see the *Wheelman* movie canned – perhaps the game should've followed suit. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Vin's cue-ball head is very shiny
SOUND Clichéd Spanish music
MULTIPLAYER Negativa

- ✓ Car chases can be exciting
- ✗ No attention to detail
- ✗ No discernible plot
- ✗ Stupid AI
- ✗ Awful on-foot controls

37

Neither fast nor furious



MERCHANTS OF BROOKLYN

If only the dev's house had flooded

DEVELOPER Paleo Entertainment
PUBLISHER Paleo Entertainment
WEBSITE www.paleoent.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz dual-core processor, 2GB RAM, and a 3D graphics card with 128MB RAM.



Hey baby, wanna party in a sub-par FPS?

IN THE FUTURE, according to doomsayers Paleo, global warming will flood most of New York City, leaving it made of slumdogs and rich people in the high rises. This bewildering and barely elaborated upon concept is about as inspiring as the rest of *Merchants of Brooklyn*. Because we're so bloody kind, we usually give indie developers' work an easier ride, but *MOB* (as it demands to be known at times) is so amateurish, messy and offensive that we can't help but kick it in the teeth.

MOB is essentially a poorly-developed FPS where you run around shooting or punching samey-looking enemies. These Neanderthals (yes, they're called that) were cloned to build up the flooded New York, but now have nothing to do but crime. This muddled plot is lost in a cloud of cringe-worthy ultraviolence and terrible music that will make you push pens into your eardrums.

You're going to punch and eviscerate your enemies in over-the-top gore that's at first disgusting and eventually boring.

Really – it's rare to find a title that actually makes us squeamish, but *MOB* forces you to tear the limbs off enemies, set them on fire, and all manner of needless gore porn. This is strangely truncated by the game's sounds, which are distant and disconnected to what's going on in the game. A gigantic smack has all the sonic weight of tenderising a pork chop. You'd think a robot tearing a man apart would sound less damp.

Even at its bargain bin price, *MOB* is frankly appalling. It's got the spit and polish of a *Quake* mod and the story of anime fan fiction. It's even buggy, with certain parts of the HUD not showing up, crashes, and even resolution bugs that meant we couldn't get it to run properly over 800x600. If this is the future, we'd rather just give up now.

Ed Zitron



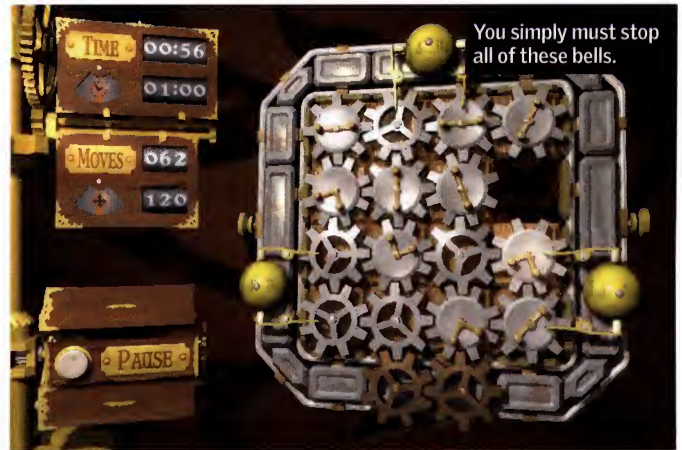
We assure you that Brooklyn isn't this crap.



PCZONE

30

Brooklyn bollocks



COGS

It makes our brain hurts, but we like it... sort of

DEVELOPER Lazy 8 Studios
PUBLISHER Lazy 8 Studios
WEBSITE cogsgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 512MB of RAM, video card with 64MB of RAM.



It's shiny for a slide puzzle.

IF YOU'VE EVER played with one of those slide puzzles that you occasionally find in Happy Meals, then *Cogs* will instantly jump out of the screen and either drag you in or throw you out the window. You see, almost every element is tied to those cheap plastic timewasters, except in glossy, yet somewhat ghostly, 3D. The goal is to complete inventions, much like *The Incredible Machine* and *Crazy Machines 2*. The caveat is that you have to do so by sliding tiles onto empty spaces.

This begins to bend your mind when you are given complex inventions to complete, such as completing a series of pipes on two sides of the same tiles, or starting a tricycle using tiles on a 3D cube. It's not unpleasant, but creates many moments of painful wastage as you realise that you've slid yourself into a tight corner and must completely reverse your way to finish. Harder still

are the modes that require you to either complete a level in a small amount of time or moves, requiring intense strategy and much brow-furrowing.

Luckily, the *Incredible Machine*-esque inventions are satisfying to complete, especially after 15 minutes of endless tile-clicking to try and move one cog into the right position. You can't even blame Lazy 8 for making the game impossible – part of the frustration comes from our cerebral inadequacy, especially on the realisation of how easy a solution is. In fact, this may be the first game in *PC ZONE* history to require a badge for making us feel stupid.

Sadly, *Cogs*' charm runs out in around five minutes, leaving some of us somewhat out of pocket if, like many of our writers, you don't like slide puzzles. In fact, if you don't, there's no point touching *Cogs*. But if you do, it's disastrously addictive.

Ed Zitron



If only it was as easy as it seems.



PCZONE

60

A slippery slope



They buy them when they're small and cute.

AND YET IT MOVES

Welcome to the centre of the world

DEVELOPER Broken Rules
PUBLISHER Broken Rules
WEBSITE www.andyetitmoves.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £12.49

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB or better graphics card.



Back to the page.

WALKING UP WALLS and on ceilings was previously the preserve of awkwardly produced TV ads about bingo, but now, here, at last, you too can scoot about on the upside-down. *And Yet It Moves* is a platformer with a brilliant torn-paper art design and the ability to rotate the world at 90° intervals. Incredibly alluring and fun to observe, it's an insistently quirky title with a simple premise: rotate the world to reach your goal.

Simple as that sounds, the mechanics never manage to sit well with your fingers, and even after an hour's play you'll still be rotating the world wrongwise half of the time. Your character is rarely integrated into



I think I did this wrong.

puzzles either. You'll have to guide some bats to chase away a chameleon, but your papery form will be falling about the level in protest. At best, you'll be able to find a crevice to store your character in while you get to work on guiding a coconut through a maze. At worst, your attempts at puzzle solving will result in death after death.

The indie charm is ever-present, but *And Yet It Moves* feels like an extended prototype. The levels feel artificially protracted, the world spinning mechanic becomes trite and unimaginative, and at £12.49 on Steam, you'll feel vaguely like somebody's had you up the jacksie.

Adam Glick



Anyone reminded of the 7-Up man?



Those pesky mushrooms. They never learn.

RUNES OF MAGIC

Hi-ho it's off to grind we go



DEVELOPER Runewalker
PUBLISHER Frogster Interactive
WEBSITE runesofmagic.com
ETA Out now
PRICE Free

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM, and 128MB graphics card. Broadband internet connection required.



Oh come on and smile, you dashing fellow you.

WHO ACTUALLY LIKES killing boars? The *World of Warcraft* phenomenon has passed me by entirely because I couldn't understand the appeal of spending hours hacking and slashing my way through hordes of low-level creatures in order to gain experience. Replace the boars with giant mushrooms, and you'll see that *Runes of Magic* makes efforts to follow the same baffling formula as *WOW*.

In the lead up to *Runes*' release, one of the main worries about the game was that it would attempt to follow the well-trodden path of *WOW* much too closely – a route many a failed MMO has dared to take. With the exception of a few new features this is exactly what *Runes* has done. The interface is unnervingly similar to Blizzard's game, and the rune system – which the developers proudly claim to be one of *Runes*' defining features – resembles the gems and socketable items found in other MMOs.

Yet the Arcane Transmuter is an interesting mechanic that does help to distinguish *Runes* from its subscription-based rivals. This feature allows you to strip stats from armour and weapons and transfer them elsewhere. This may stand it head-and-shoulders above its free-to-play peers, but it isn't enough to compete with the genre's heavyweights.

This is a solid MMO that ticks most of the boxes that fans of the genre will be looking for, especially those who like statistical spreadsheeting. The dual-class feature and promised update schedule do distinguish it somewhat, but it's still completely overshadowed by its behemoth rivals in terms of gameplay, character development, refinement and detail.

Runes of Magic goes some way to disarming us of our distrust of free-to-play MMOs (is it only us expecting an invoice any day now?), but it's leagues behind the subscription-based MMOs of the world.

Laurence Elliott



A kinky French maid – free with every house.





SECRET FILES 2: PURITAS CORDIS

Those files aren't so secret now

DEVELOPER Fusionsphere Systems
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE snipurl.com/secretfiles2
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Pentium III 800MHz, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB graphics card.



AS IS COMMONPLACE with low budget adventures, there are some problems with *Secret Files 2: Puritas Cordis* that mean it never really shifts itself out of the lower gears. It's pleasant enough, with reasonable characters and puzzles that aren't easy but don't tax your brain excessively. Just think of it as the genre's Wigan Athletic.

Anyway, *Secret Files 2* puts you back in control of Nina Kalenkow, fresh from her adventures in Mother Russia. She's about to go on a holiday, a lovely cruise on an allegedly luxury liner. Suddenly, a man dies, her luggage gets nicked and, gradually, conspiracies about the end of the world begin to surface, more people get bumped off, you realise there's virtually nobody aboard the ship, there are only five cabins, and so on.

You don't just get to control the stripy-topped heroine though – there are a handful of other characters who

you get to guide through the story, including an ill-fated clergyman and Nina's old flame, Max. This helps add a little variety to the proceedings, although the gameplay remains the same, with some old school "put huge object in tiny trouser pocket" laughs to be had for the observant. Nina, for example, manages to fit a very large oar into her trousers. What would Freud have made of that, we wonder.

I seem to have run out of space, so I'll sum the game up quickly: the voice acting veers between acceptable and annoying, the graphics are passable, while the control system is clean and functional. Some of the characters are annoying, like the little kid on the cruise liner, but most of them don't grate too much, it has to be said.

Overall, *Secret Files 2* is your typical modern adventure really: none too shabby, but none too brilliant either.
David Brown



ELVEN LEGACY

The PC market embodied in one Russian strategy game

DEVELOPER Ino-Co
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce FX 5700 or ATI Radeon 9600.



YOU SEE, THIS is why we love PC gaming. *Elven Legacy* contains within itself all the problems that consistently bug us as PC gaming enthusiasts, yet it also has this substantial depth and "one more go" factor that makes us come back for more. It is also, at times, hilariously badly made, but is charming because of this, rather than simply annoying.

The intro sequence, talking about some elves and things that have happened to them, is atrocious. The graphics are on a par with *World of Warcraft* (which is curious, as the in-game visuals are sometimes pretty) and the narrator's voice gets cut off at the end of certain sentences. Not good.

Then the tutorial has a very silly voiceover that is trying to be dramatic, but fails because all he's really talking about is clicking mouse buttons. There's also the fact that part of the tutorial is

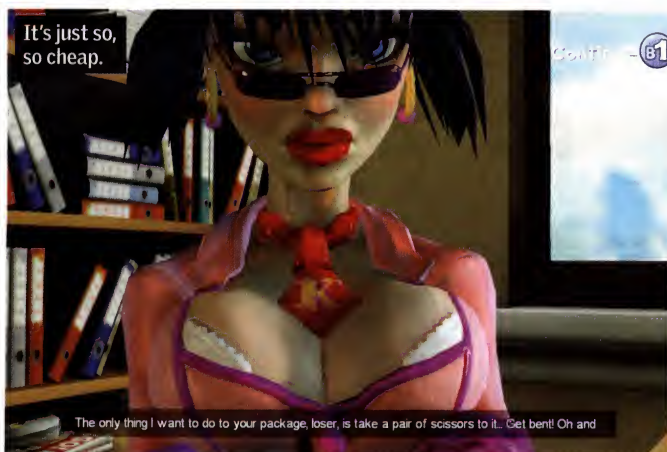
voiced in Russian for no reason. OK, it's a Russian game, but the rest of it has been dubbed in English, so why was part of the tutorial just ignored?

The game itself is old-school turn-based hexagonal strategy. These were all the rage way back in the days before *Command & Conquer*, but are lepers in today's gaming culture. One thing they always are is in-depth and challenging, and *Elven Legacy* is no different. Each unit can move and attack once per turn (with some exceptions). Behind this are numerous strategic decisions – covering fire, terrain issues etc – and enough scope, especially with the multiplayer, for some great tactical battles.

That *Elven Legacy* is so badly presented is a shame, as there's a surprisingly good strategy game hidden underneath the amateurish exterior. Polish that up and you might be onto a winner, Ino-Co.

David Brown





LEISURE SUIT LARRY: BOX OFFICE BUST

Like having your brains sucked out

DEVELOPER Funsta
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE leisuresuitlarrygame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a Geforce 6600 or Radeon X1300 or better graphics card.

THIS GAME SHOULD be buried deep underground and then eaten by worms. Ironical Team 17 are partly responsible for this prolapsed rectum of a game. The weird thing is, clearly lots of money has been pumped into this project. Hollywood personalities like Carmen Electra, Shannon Elizabeth and Nikki Cox won't have come cheap (*cough*) after all – and yet it is just so utterly devoid of anything that will make sane people want to play it.

If you do choose to do so, you'll play Larry Lovage, nephew of the original Larry Laffer, who joins his uncle on the latter's film lot to sniff out a mole from a rival studio, run by the un-hilariously named Big Anus. Along the way you'll be getting involved with the wacky world of Tinseltown – you can create your own movies (kind of), play some dire mini-games themed around woeful puns on major films, plus ogle some

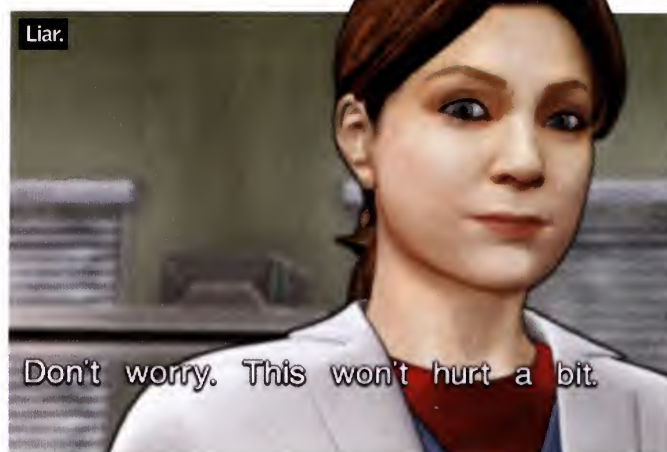


horribly designed female characters, who resemble recipients of plastic surgery from Dr Mengele.

Two things this game is trying to do – entice perverts with the promise of "hot girls in bikinis" and get people laughing at its self-described 'saucy' humour. However, not even sex-starved lunatics could be turned on by the monstrous mannequins in this game, while the humour is as amusing as forcefully humping a bee's nest. You'll also surely fail to avoid being bored to death by the excruciatingly dull open-world mechanic.

Box Office Bust plays a bit like *Psychonauts*, but lacks any and all of that game's wonderful charms. If you want to play a *Leisure Suit Larry* game, dig out the first one instead. Why don't Codemasters commission a new *Dizzy* game instead of wasting money on this shit?

David Brown



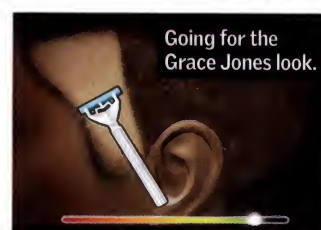
GREY'S ANATOMY

An utter waste of time



DEVELOPER Longtail Studios
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE greysanatomyvideogame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8GHz processor (2GHz *Vista*), 512MB RAM (1GB *Vista*), and a 64MB graphics or better card.



I'VE NEVER BEEN more insulted by a game in my entire life. Does something even count as a mini-game if all you have to do is click the mouse and hold the button down for two seconds? If this is what 'casual gaming' means, please shoot me in the head right now so I can avoid having to play the things for all eternity.

If you haven't seen an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* then you'll either be charmed by its shiny, sterilised view of US hospitals or you'll feel physically sick within a few seconds of the vomit-inducing bullshit it serves up as entertainment. (If you must watch bad TV, make it *Hollyoaks* – at least that doesn't pretend it's a quality drama.)

The game itself – and I'm using the word 'game' very loosely – involves choosing the direction of the episode by finishing various mini-games. That's it. These little gaming vignettes come thick and fast, interrupting what flow there is every couple of seconds. There

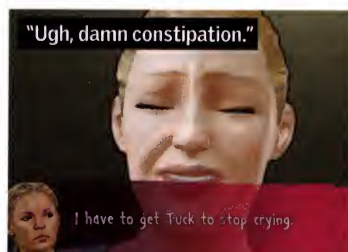
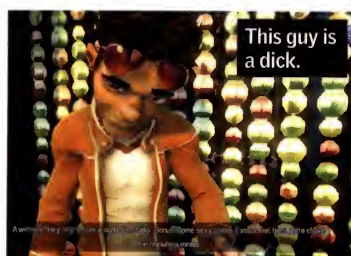


are a few different types, but they are all beyond atrocious. In the surgery mini-games, one of your difficult tasks is to inject the patient. You do this by clicking and holding for two seconds. Success! Even the *Little Britain* game was more challenging.

Still, it is better than that pile because of two things: the cartoon graphics aren't too offensive and the paper-tearing mini-game has a nice ripping sound in it.

Grey's Anatomy is unadulterated shite of almost the lowest possible order. And yet Ubisoft have the gall to charge 20 fucking quid for it!

David Brown





WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

No big blue penises in sight

DEVELOPER Deadline Games
PUBLISHER Warner Bros Interactive
WEBSITE watchmenvideogame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £12.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card compatible with Shader Model 3.0.



FORTUNATELY FOR FANS, Deadline Games hasn't shat out a steamer with the official game of the official film of the official graphic novel. *Watchmen: The End is Nigh* is actually good fun if taken in short doses after you switch off all higher brain functions. It's also advisable to watch 10 episodes of *Hollyoaks* in a row before playing, just to make sure you've wiped your mind clean of all thought or intelligence.

You play either Rorschach or Nite Owl II (with a friend taking up split-screen duties if you have one willing to play) on a quest to find out why there's a riot in Sing Sing prison. The gameplay consists exclusively of drubbing enemies into unconsciousness using a variety of hand-to-hand attacks. Weapons such as crowbars, glass bottles and big pipes crop up as the enemies get tougher, which you can wield in your defence if you want. The combat is actually

surprisingly good fun mostly. Finishing moves and special abilities can be pulled off and used often, so you're only ever a few seconds away from a brutal limb snap or crushing skull blow.

However, it is also incredibly repetitive, considering you'll be doing essentially the same thing throughout the entire game. It is also buggy, with my AI companion getting stuck on a wall and forcing me to restart the level at one point. On the whole though, the combat is decent as long as you don't play too long, the voices are provided by the actors from the movie and the controls are simple and quite responsive.

But the game is very, very repetitive and very, very dumb, falling light years short of the novel's depth. Dr Manhattan wears pants as well. Most annoyingly though, by being reasonable it's prevented me from using "Shite Owl" or "Bore-schach" in the summary below.
David Brown



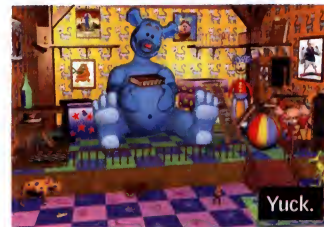
GOBLIINS 4

What were they thinking? Were they even thinking?



DEVELOPER Soci  t   Pollen  
PUBLISHER Kalypso
WEBSITE gobliins4.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 512MB RAM (2GB Vista), and a DirectX 9.0c compatible graphics card.



I'M JUST SITTING here looking at the specs for *Gobliins 4* and I'm wondering whether they should actually read "MHz processor, 5MB RAM, and a VGA-compatible graphics card". This might be a slight exaggeration, but *Gobliins 4* just looks absolutely horrible.

We're not ones to blow the visuals trumpet more than necessary, but this is just very sloppy. It looks like they just took the engine for the early '90s originals and upped the resolution to a maximum (yes, maximum) of 1024x768. But don't worry! Your £400 graphics card will be maxed out by the fact you use incredible 32-bit colours!

Gobliins 4 is similar in style (a good thing) to the previous three games, though it's neither anywhere near as hard (a bad thing) or anywhere near as good (a very bad thing). You control three goblins, each with their own abilities. For example, Stucco the

Warrior is strong and can be used for, well, strength-oriented things. Tchoop the Detective is the object-manipulating guy, and Perlius the Wizard is... you get the idea. There are 15 levels to get through, each contained within one screen. It's a faithful representation of the original concepts, just one that is hideously executed.

If you do play this, you might be driven insane by the moronic noises and baby-speak of the characters (literally: one of them is the digitised voice of an infant). You might also grimace at the fact that on the second level, an object needed for progression is absent, preventing progression. A restart of the level was no help and we were stuck in place. Not good.

If you must have some *Gobliins* action, just get the originals. This one should never have made it into the public domain.
David Brown



State of Play

Every month we cast fresh eyes over the changes made to long-running games...



The scary statue made everyone leave town.



"This way. This way. The camera is this way!"

THIS MONTH...

SPORE

PUBLISHER EA Maxis WEBSITE spore.com PRICE £39.99

WE ORIGINALLY MADE *State of Play* to re-review MMOs and shooters that have matured over the months and years, we can't help but return to other genres as their games mature.

Spore, in the words of its own creators, is a Massively Single-player Online game that enables players to create their own creatures, vehicles, spaceships and other evolutionary masterpieces. The key is that these are shared through the Sporepedia, a gigantic online repository of people's horrible/remarkable creations.

The internet, grasping *Spore* like an easel expressly made for filth, decided to create as many possible horrific things, ranging from creatures that looked like

they were bugging themselves to gigantic flying cocks. Luckily it was just an awkward, sweaty phase in their lives, and the *Sporepedia* itself has grown into an incredible source.

EVOLUTION TWIST

While not completely different every time, each new game of *Spore* takes on a new life if you involve yourself in the various Sporecasts. These, depending on the user, are either a random pack of their favourite creatures or theme sets. These vary from your average "I did a pack of spaceships from popular films" to the more impressive Animals pack, a slowly growing number of scarily life-like creatures, from skunks to deer, that can inhabit your world. It's strangely

gratifying to fly around the space stage and find a planet of raccoons, only to get bombarded with bombs from an angry honking army of star-geese.

The Cute & Creepy Parts Pack was, predictably, not the most inventive thing in the world, giving players the chance to make adorable or frightening things, and EA's executives to sit on chairs made of fine furs. In fact, most of the more interesting changes to *Spore* have come from Maxis' attention to detail with patches, smoothing out a lot of the difficulty niggles that terrorised *Spore*'s

early users. Those of you who picked up the game early will remember the housekeeping a gigantic space empire required. If it wasn't the goose-men of Algaphrax attacking, it was the collapsing ecosystem on Galloosh, or even a virus on Taff requiring your extermination skills. This led many players to spend most of the game flying around fixing minor problems or saying "bugger it" and letting their empires fail.

Maxis have made adjustments to focus you on progressing towards either the centre of the galaxy or building your

Outsized, but never out-gunned.

THE STORY SO FAR... MAXIS



1987 PRIMODAL OOZE
Jeff Braun and Will Wright found Maxis and publish *SimCity* to (eventually) great success.

1993 BACTERIA FORMS
SimCity 2000 gets a widespread release across PCs, Macs, and even Amigas, gaining yet more explosive praise.



1996 AMPHIBIANS
Maxis releases the dire *SimCopter*, best known for its gyrating 'himbos': men in tight trunks with glowing nipples who'd kiss each other and leap into your helicopter's blades. Really.

1997 EARLY MAMMALS
EA, respecting both Maxis' heritage and egalitarianism, complete their consumption of the company.



2002 HOMO ERECTUS
The Sims becomes the best-selling game of all time. EA lock Will Wright in a box 400 miles beneath the sea to keep him from enjoying the money.



2008 HOMO SAPIENS
EA Maxis releases *Spore*, giving Will Wright the chance to be creative, after burying his last franchise in terrible expansions.



"This is an incredible, never-to-be repeated journey"

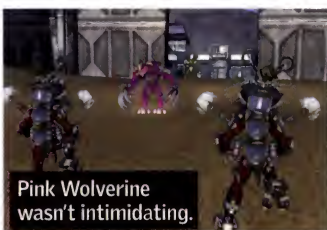
95% – Jon Blyth, PC ZONE #199

empire, rather than constantly defending it from marauding armies or disease. Playing the *Spore* endgame now (as opposed to last year) is a refreshing and addictive safari. On easy and normal mode, players will find much of the frustration has been taken away.

Those of you who never found their way to the central planet, cultivated their civilization to true dominance through commerce or violence, or just turned off after losing a planet four times in a row will find *Spore*'s final stage more fun.

A QUIRKY FUTURE

The Creature stages haven't had so much love dedicated to them, partially because we reckon a great deal of balance work and testing was done in the development phase. However, Maxis recently patched in health-giving armour-plated exoskeletons. While it's not



Pink Wolverine wasn't intimidating.

Cavedog's a-unit-a-week addition to *Total Annihilation*, there's certainly some worth in Maxis dropping free stuff on our laps.

Spore has an interesting future ahead of it. At present, the game can be over with quickly – an addicted player could find themselves lost in the game for around 30 hours at a stretch. However, later in the year, Maxis are debuting *Galactic Adventures*, adding a bit more depth to the Space stage immediately, but potentially creating a whole new level of user-generated content. While there're the usual bells and whistles of additional terraforming powers, planet-shapes and creature-parts, players can beam down and complete *World of Warcraft*-esque missions (we presume) on the surface of planets.

The big ooh-factor comes from Maxis creating a *City of Heroes*-style mission maker. Players will be able to build specific quests and plots and share them across the Sporepedia – though the

exact implementation remains to be seen. This potentially opens *Spore* up a great deal more, with actual interaction between players. Ultimately, though, the logical next step would be for EA to allow players to visit and interact with each other in their own *Spore* universes, but the stench of MMO, and the abject failure of *The Sims Online*, will likely dissuade EA from this.

Regardless of never fully connecting you to another player, the future of *Spore* seems to be in content sharing. Unless *Galactic Adventures*' tools can create truly addictive missions.

VERDICT

If you're up for semi-social gaming at a slower pace than any other game out there, or you're the creative type, *Spore*'s future is certainly one to be involved in. **Ed Zitron**

Budget

David Brown is so cheap he was once caught stealing expired ham from a 99p store

STRANGLEHOLD

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £9.77

WE WERE ASKED recently whether buying *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* would be worth it, because the reader in question hadn't liked *Stranglehold*. Now despite its flaws, *Stranglehold* is still a reasonably good third-person action game. (Better than the almost-criminally short *Wanted*, at any rate.)

Even if the games were identical, the ability to play as 'Tequila' Yuen from *Hard*

Boiled (this is, after all, the official sequel to that Hong Kong action classic) would make it the more viable option for purchase. At this bargain price, it is an even better decision.

The game plays like a more console-y version of *Max Payne*, with the emphasis on blowing everything up. That means the scenery is incredibly destructible, with pottery shards, broken tables, chairs, crockery and plaster flying about all over the place as the bullets zing to and fro.

As with most of the good (and bad) games found in the lands of the cheap, *Stranglehold* hasn't held up fantastically well as time has gone by, but for a quick blast and a smidgeon of Tequila Time,

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**



Tequila's got big trouble in little China.

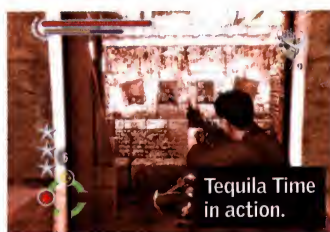
there's few cheap games out there to beat it.

The game still feels like it was designed for our pad-wielding drone brothers, but the level of destruction will keep all but the pickiest of action fans entertained for a short while.

PCZONE

69

Woo-t a lot of fun



Tequila Time in action.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

David watched a Liverpool match using somebody else's season ticket.
SAVING £47



Steve found a stray cat, so didn't have to go to Tesco for dinner.
SAVING A dodgy Chinese takeaway

Ali finished second in a beauty contest and received £10. She then rolled seven, and passed Go.
SAVING £210



KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £9.77

KANE & LYNCH looked like it was going to be such a big success, the next definitive franchise built by the guys at IO Interactive, making them oodles more money to sit alongside the big pile of *Hitman* cash they've already made. But sadly this was not to be the case.

Despite having a bucketload of interesting ideas – the Fragile Alliance mode, the interplay between the two titular characters – was hidden under a number of problems, not least of which was buyer apathy. The Fragile Alliance mode never really got the chance to live

up to its potential, because few were interested enough to buy the game.

You can't really blame them, as the annoying automatic cover system was but one of the stupid console conventions that just had to be bloody stuck in. No, it didn't, IO. Don't do it again, please.



PCZONE
60



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE splintercell.com PRICE £9.99

THE BEGINNING OF the end for the *Splinter Cell* series or the end of the beginning? Who knows what the next iteration will bring, but for now, this is the flawed gem that represents all that is good and bad with the series.

The good being that the gameplay is just what you'd expect and is still great fun. The bad is represented by the hideous bugs that, even now, rear their grotesque heads out of the screen and clamp their acid-dripping mouths over your poor, unprotected eyes.

This was such a shame, as clearly there is just as much magic, if not more,



in this game than there was in the other *Splinter Cell* games, it was just cruelly tarnished by the bug problem. Such was the extent of the bug troubles that Ubisoft's reputation was perhaps forever affected in the eyes of thousands of



consumers because of the state the game was released in.

A great game, just tragically, and fatally, broken.

PCZONE
65

LOST: VIA DOMUS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE lostgame.us.ubi.com PRICE £9.99

AS THE SERIES goes from strength to "eh?" to more strength, this game just looks more and more like a sharpened butt-plug viciously thrust up into the rectum of the unsuspecting consumer. In *Lost: Via Domus*' case, this gaming dildo is in the shape of a particularly rotten coconut. One that is

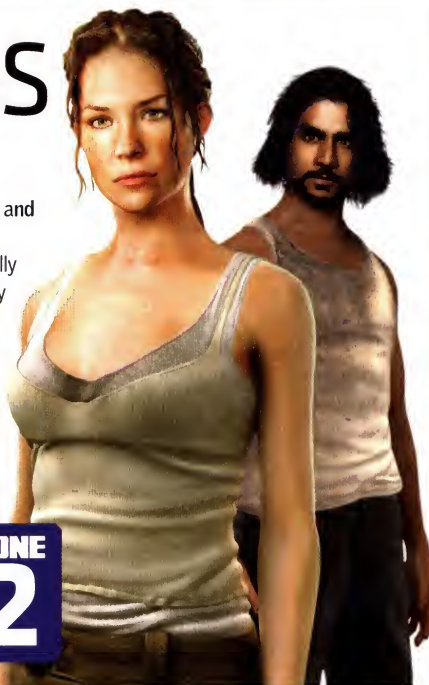
multiplied throughout the game and just begs to be collected.

I'll admit that I've never actually watched the show, but I'm reliably informed that *Via Domus*' saving grace is its plot which is of interest to fans of the series. Sadly, this is turned on its head and driven face-first into the mat by woeful animation, hilariously bad puzzles, and a series of design mistakes that require you to die repeatedly.

This is one game you hope never escapes the island.



PCZONE
12



AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



SECOND SIGHT

£4.99 Steam

Hugely console-centric, with a style of its own, this game doesn't deserve your time.

48



CONFLICT: DENIED OPS

£9.77 Mastertronic

Average at best when it came out, it hasn't got any better. In fact, it's worse.

50



DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

£5.99 Steam

Parallel Lines is a decent game to fall back on if you lack the money to get *GTA4*.

60

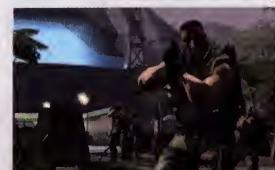
PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



ROME: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, SEGA

Huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people beating each other to shit and back.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

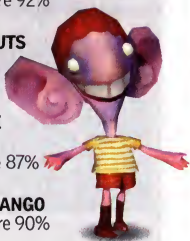
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

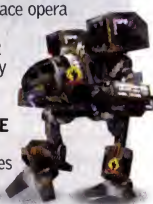
PCZ TOP 5 THINGS TIM SCHAFER HAS DONE FOR US...

- 1 MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE**
N/A
- 2 FULL THROTTLE**
Issue 27, score 92%
- 3 PSYCHONAUTS**
Issue 156, score 90%
- 4 DAY OF THE TENTACLE**
Issue 7, score 87%
- 5 GRIM FANDANGO**
Issue 71, score 90%



PCZ TOP 5 GAMES THAT SHOULD COME BACK

- 1 FREESPACE**
Classic space combat flight sim
- 2 WING COMMANDER**
A near-perfect space opera
- 3 MECHWARRIOR**
Big stompy shooty robot simulator
- 4 FREEDOM FORCE**
Cheesy fun with cheesy superheroes
- 5 UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN**
Brilliant turn-based strategy that is (possibly) coming back in some form. YAY!



PCZ TOP 5 PLOTS FROM TOM CLANCY'S GAMES

- 1 EVIL TERRORISTS ATTACK AMERICA**
- 2 EVIL RUSSIANS ATTACK AMERICA**
- 3 EVIL CHINESE ATTACK AMERICA**
- 4 EVIL EUROPEANS ATTACK AMERICA**
- 5 EVIL AMERICANS ATTACK AMERICA**



FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the we enjoy more than shooting zombies is shooting zombies as a team. And that's what L4D has - endless killing of mindlessly murderous plague victims, while you chortle and scream with your buddies.



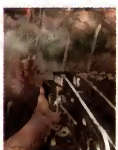
TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



CRYSIS WARHEAD

PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%
This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
This psion of System Shock 2 will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best Total War game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



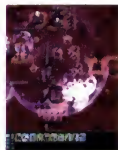
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of GTA4 adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



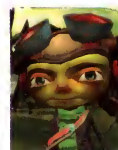
GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see GOW2.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

PCZ Issue 207 - 87%
The new story in the *Chronicles of Riddick* is a mix of brutal knife fights and stealth, which means you need fast fingers and brains. And it comes with a revamped *Escape from Butcher Bay*.

NEW ENTRY!

MMOS



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



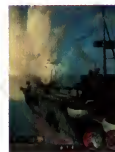
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X3* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If you fancy a life beneath the waves, this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 - 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Graham Nortons.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.

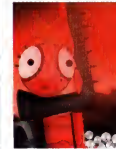


GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended. (Well, fish-tailing '60s).

ODDBALL



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, and as smart as Stephen Fry, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddie-looking graphics - it's a keeper.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 - 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009
PCZ Issue: 201 - 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.



NBA 2K9
PCZ Issue: 203 - 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 - 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 - 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens - it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs - if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

MAY

BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC
FUEL
VIRTUA TENNIS 2009

EIDOS
CODEMASTERS
SEGA

JUNE

ANNO 1404
ARMED ASSAULT II
CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD
CHAMPIONS ONLINE
GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME
HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF BLOOD PRINCE
MAJESTY 2: THE FANTASY KINGDOM SIM
OVERLORD II
PROTOTYPE
RED FACTION: GUERRILLA
THE SIMS 3
TERMINATOR SALVATION

UBISOFT
505 GAMES
UBISOFT
ATARI
ATARI
EA
PARADOX
CODEMASTERS
ACTIVISION
THQ
EA
WARNER BROS

AUTUMN

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE 2
NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

ACTIVISION
EA

TBC

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 3
ALPHA PROTOCOL
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS
DEUS EX 3
MAFIA II
MASS EFFECT 2
OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

SEGA
SEGA
EIDOS
2K GAMES
EIDOS
2K GAMES
EA
CODEMASTERS

XBOX 360

PS3

PSP

Wii

8DS

PSP

PC

The UK's longest running games magazine

ON SALE NOW

THE MASTER OF GAMES SINCE 1993

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HUGE SONY HD-TV
+ 360 SIGNED BY
UFC CHAMPS!

EXCLUSIVE!

TRANSFORMERS

REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

See it first and find out everything!

EXCLUSIVE!

New official F1 game DRIVEN!

**ROCKSTAR'S
BEST EVER GAME?**



WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Five years in the making. Bigger than GTA IV. Only in this mag!

MORE GAMES THAN ANY OTHER MAG!

- ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
- X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
- COD: MODERN WARFARE 2
- POKÉMON PLATINUM
- BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
- PES 2010 + MORE!

Pokémon DS
sticker set

Cheats book



**2
FREE
GIFTS!**





PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

D-SASTER

D-LINK ARE IN the doghouse this week. What I needed was a bridge to connect a wired network of two PCs on one side of my house with the wireless internet on the other. To do this I bought the £115 D-Link DAP-1353.

This is a Wireless N access point with integrated bridge, repeater and client. While you'd normally use an AP with your wireless device to connect them to a wired network, the DAP-1353 would work the other way round as a bridge.

A permanent link over the airwaves with my wireless network would mean that any wired devices I plugged in would be transparently joined to it. It saves trailing wires across carpets or under doors.

Only the DAP-1353 didn't bloody well work. That cold, sinking feeling meant I'd gone and bought the wrong model – Captain Technical had purchased himself a plain old access point.

But wait. D-Link's documentation confirmed that the DAP-1353 was exactly what I needed, so was the wrong item in the right box? Nothing so simple.

I'll tell you the problem: the unit ships with only a fraction of the advertised features working. You need to download a firmware update to enable them, which is tricky when you're stuck with wired devices that can't access the internet.

Thanks D-Link, you're best!

Wand

Phil Wand,
Hardware editor

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**
BY STEVE HOGARTY

GENE POOL

Miniature gaming mobo means one size fits all

ASUS'S NEW ROG Maximus II GENE might be the only motherboard you ever need.

An mATX form factor means you can cram it into the smallest cases and still game on the biggest of TVs. The board's P45 Express chipset supports all LGA775 Core 2 Extreme, Quad and Duo processors, plus 1,600MHz FSB and up to 16GB of 1,300MHz DDR2 memory across four slots.

There's also two PCI-Express x16 slots and CrossFireX support, not to mention an integrated SupremeFX X-Fi chip offering eight channel audio and EAX 4.0 support. You even get a sensible software bundle: Kaspersky Anti-Virus the and 3DMark06 Advanced Edition benchmarking utility.

Despite the home theatre PC dimensions, it's still a full-on Republic of Gamers product. Features such as one-click desktop overclocking tools and an easily accessible push-button CMOS

reset mean you can change the way your hardware works without getting your screwdriver out. You can even adjust board settings from within games and benchmarks.

The board is likely to come in just shy of £155. Don't forget that if you use a half-height Micro ATX case, your choice of graphics cards will be severely restricted. uk.asus.com



The ROG Maximus II GENE lacks in size, but not features.

3D SPACE

The dream controller for RTS games?

SOLD AS THE ultimate mouse for designers using CAD packages, 3Dconnexion's SpacePilot PRO could be ideal for RTS gamers.

With the same pressure-sensitive controller as the SpaceNavigator – an

earlier device that bundles a free copy of *Multiwinia* – the new SpacePilot allows users to push, pull, twist or tilt to simultaneously pan, zoom and rotate. Customisable function keys and keyboard command keys (such as Ctrl, Alt and Esc) round things off. It's arguably the world's most impressive strategy game controller.

3Dconnexion devices are already compatible with *Google Earth* and *Photoshop*, and work with all versions of Windows from XP onward. The only obvious sticking point is the \$499 (£340) price tag. 3dconnexion.com



Makes your PC look like a BMW 7-Series.

NEWS ROUND-UP

TOSHIBA HAVE EXPANDED on their self-encrypting drive technology. It takes the form of a controller chip that encrypts and decrypts data as it's written to and read from the drive. Users will be asked to login with the drive spins up. The British government will be relieved to hear that data breaches could be a thing of the past. toshiba.com

INTEL HAVE DEMONSTRATED their AMD and NVIDIA-rivalling Larrabee graphics product at the Intel Developer Forum in China. Graphics products that use the innovative GPU are due in 2010. intel.com

NVIDIA'S ALL-NEW DirectX 11 chip is set to appear this Autumn. nvidia.com

HYPERTHREADING: The ability to sew at extreme speeds. Due to the heat created through friction, this requires the use of asbestos thimbles to protect fingertips, and ceramic needles as standard ones melt. **FATALITY:** An occasional tragic hardware failure in PCs which causes the death of the user. Known fatalities include spinning DVDs being launched out of slot drives, and USB cables strangling the unwary. **PENTIUM D:** One of the last CPUs that had a simple name. Single digit identifies are no longer seen as cool by marketing types. **REBADGING:** Some devious cubs and scouts strip badges from their shirts and add better ones before transferring to a new troop.



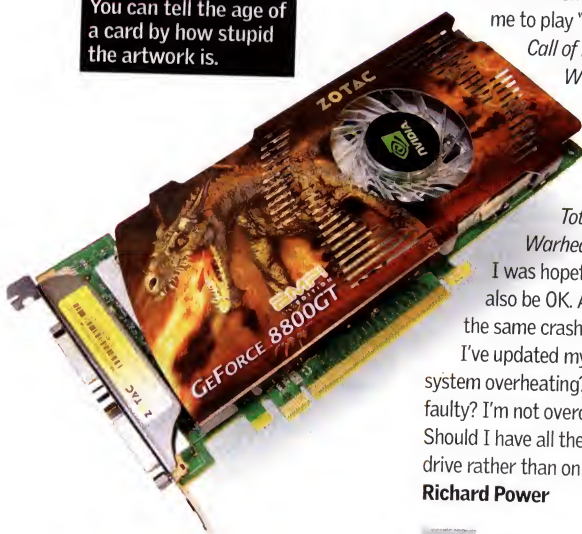
Dear Wandy

If it ain't working, don't panic – Wandy's here...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

You can tell the age of a card by how stupid the artwork is.



Q TOXIC MOANS

I rebuilt my PC last autumn, and ever since have had intermittent performance issues. I'm at my wits end now and am thinking about giving up on PC gaming, as there's a certain pointlessness in purchasing games that don't work.

I have an ASUS M3A with 2GB RAM, Phenom X4 9950 Black Edition, Sapphire Radeon HD 4850 Toxic Edition, and a Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty. The main problem is that my system crashes after a few minutes when playing many graphically intensive games. Nine times out of 10 it'll show a screen of vertical lines, and recently has been blacking out the screen with a 'no signal' message from the monitor.

In troubleshooting *Crysis*, EA told me to play "in XP mode". Oddly,

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, *World at War* and *Medal of Honor: Airborne* all work fine. Having received *Empire: Total War* and *Crysis Warhead* for my birthday,

I was hopeful these would also be OK. Alas, no, I'm seeing the same crashes.

I've updated my drivers. Is the system overheating? Is the hardware faulty? I'm not overclocking in any way. Should I have all the games on the C: drive rather than on E: drive?

Richard Power

A When faced with a problem like this, you have to approach it in a composed and logical fashion. After taking a deep breath, the very next thing I would do is check your PSU. The minimum demanded by Sapphire for the HD 4850 is 450W, and the fact you've omitted your supply's details tells me it's something you've overlooked. Many do.

You should also remove one of your RAM chips and run memtest, swapping the chips over after completion and doing the same thing again – new RAM is needed if any test fails.

While inside your case, peer closely at that Radeon. Although the Toxic



Sapphire's Toxic range runs faster but cooler. What's not to like?

integrates a Zalman VF900-Cu that's able to dismiss any heat from the GPU underneath, it's an unshielded design that can easily be snagged by wires, and the fins can be bent out of shape by a heavy handed installer. Check the Overdrive panel of the Catalyst Control Centre and ensure the temperature doesn't exceed 50°C when idling and 60°C when gaming.

The next job should be to check your Sound Blaster. Download the most recent drivers for the M3A's ALC883 chip, then remove the Creative X-Fi drivers and pull out the Fatal1ty. Restart, and re-enable onboard audio in the BIOS. Speaking of the BIOS, you also need to ensure that it's fully up to date, and that you remembered to install the latest AMD 770 chipset driver in all your fiddling about.

You could perhaps uninstall your video driver and reinstall it without the Catalyst Control Centre, or install something like RivaTuner (guru3d.com/rivatuner) to put the Toxic's clocks back to their stock levels, but if you've reached this point in your investigations and are still none the wiser, my suspicion would be that your card is bugged.

You could go down the route of reinstalling Windows (in your case, I'd install both XP and Vista to separate partitions just to make sure), but I don't

hold out much hope that changing Windows will cure your ills.

Q SHOPPING LIST

I'm planning to build my own computer and would like your help. Will this specification work: ASUS P5K SE with Core 2 Duo E7200, GeForce 8800 GT, 1TB Samsung Spinpoint F1, OCZ 4GB PC2-8500, Sound Blaster Audigy Value and LG DVD drive.

I'm planning to run Windows Vista 32-bit. What PSU do I need?

Stephen Gormley

A I'd be inclined to ditch the Sound Blaster and use the P5K's integrated audio instead. Unless you're a dyed in the wool NVIDIA nut, you may also want to switch the 8800 GT for a Radeon HD 4850. The latter is the same price and yet is more powerful across a broader range of resolutions and detail levels. In either case, make sure you get the 1GB variant.

As for the power supply, I would be inclined to get the 500W Seasonic S12II-500 for around £70, or the 450W Corsair VX for around £60.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.3	18 Mar 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 182.50	02 Apr 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

"If you want a decent gaming rig, you'll need to set aside £450 to £550 and go shopping online"

Q HP WORK SEDATION

I've just bitten the bullet and bought *Call of Duty: World at War* but it feels like I'm running with bungees attached to my back. When I try to get a bead on a target it's as though I'm moving my weapon through custard (no sniggers please). It's the same online and in solo play.

Is it the game or my PC? My system is an HP xw series Workstation, with 3.2GHz Pentium D, 2GB RAM and NVIDIA Quadro FX 1400. All my drivers are up to date.

I have been toying with an upgrade for some time, but I'm not sure where to start, or do I need a new PC?

Any help would be appreciated.

Steve Dalgarno

A Without question, your PC is what's landed you in the custard. Like any Pentium D, yours is long past best – if you were to benchmark it alongside one of today's entry-level gaming processors such as Intel's E8200 or AMD's Phenom X4 9850 – either of which can be had online for little more than £100 – it would barely register as being half as fast.

Couple an inherent wheeziness with a Quadro FX 1400, essentially an old

GeForce 6800 wearing a suit and tie, and you're not going to be able to play modern games with any degree of fluency. The silly thing about the Quadro is that you've paid business sector money for something that in gaming terms is no different to the home market equivalent – £450 vs £150. It does lead me to ask question, what are you doing with a workstation PC?

Upgrades are out of the question as you'll simply be throwing good money after bad. If you want a decent gaming rig, you'll need to set aside £450 to £550 and go shopping online. Your HP will make decent money on eBay, so don't just bin it!

Q ALIEN POWERS

I'd appreciate your thoughts about the recurring problems with an Alienware ALX bought March 27, 2008 for the princely sum of £6,131.

May 9: HDD stops working. Spend hours diagnosing, then wait for replacement. Fair enough, everything has manufacturing problems.

July 22: Machine stops working. There's no way to switch it on. Am given endless list of things to do, so request Alienware look at it.

September 4: Machine returned with new motherboard.

ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN PC TECH...



Ready for an Intel graphics card that works? You, me, and everyone else.

14 LARRABEE

Larrabee is the codename for Intel's radical makeover of the graphics processing unit (GPU), and it's now due in under a year. Intel will be pitching it as a direct rival to existing Radeon and GeForce products, making it the company's first GPU that is fully independent of the motherboard on which it sits. While AMD and NVIDIA have done their best to poo poo the whole concept, Intel's designers have based Larrabee around multiple Pentium 4 cores – up to 24 on the same chip – with an expanded instruction for graphics handling. The team responsible for Intel's i7 processor are working on the company's first foray into discrete graphics, and the fact the product will execute code like a CPU means that developers wishing to take advantage of the chip's general purpose GPU (GPGPU) features will be able to do so with the minimum of fuss. Of course, not one of Intel's graphics products have been worth anything more than a cursory glance, so it remains to be seen whether Intel will make Larrabee a success.



September 23: Machine fails again, return to Alienware. New video cards and power supply.

January 9: It's taken three months for the machine to be returned. Where power supply has been changed, existing connectors no longer reach.

January 18: Switch machine on, won't start. Connectors have been detached in transit as badly packed. Tech support unhelpful, do it myself.

February 6: Get machine working.

February 7, 2009: Machine fails again. New motherboard! Again!

As there is not much left of this machine that is original why does it keep failing?

I'd appreciate your thoughts as my son in some ways wants to keep the

machine, but if it's going to remain as unreliable I feel I need compensation.

Frances Leask

A My only advice would be to ensure you have anti-surge protection between the machine and the power socket.

I'd be inclined to use the Sale of Goods Act to get a replacement PC or your money back. The Act protects people in your situation, and given the machine was not only delivered faulty, but has given you a year of constant frustration, should mean you have a very good case.

Just make sure you keep all letters and emails and a written record of how the situation developed. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(siouxie) I've a registry key that seems to be corrupted and I can't do anything with it. I've used four or five programs to try and get rid, but it's still there. The key is HKLM\SOFTWARE\Classes\Steam. I've not got *Steam* installed, but because of this registry key I can't install *Steam*. Is there anything I can do to just delete it? If I just click on it and try and delete like that it gives me the error "Error while deleting key", like I said I've tried registry cleaners but they miss it entirely. (Wandy) Best done in Safe Mode. Right-click SOFTWARE\Classes\Steam key > Permissions > then choose Advanced > Replace permissions and Owner > Replace Owner. Et voilà.

HOW WE TESTED

SPEED: Graphics cards need fast processors to deal with today's high-end games, and fast memory to prevent slow downs. **INSTALLATION:** We judged whether a card is easy to fit physically and get working once installed. **RELIABILITY:** Does the card work smoothly in *Windows* and games without causes system crashes?

GIGABYTE GTS 250 OC

PRICE £144 **MANUFACTURER** Gigabyte
WEBSITE giga-byte.co.uk

THERE SIMPLY ISN'T a place for this card right now. With the recent price cut of the excellent GTX 260, the two GPU architectures stand disturbingly close in price, but a mile apart in performance. Essentially GTS 250 cards are running on years old technology, and in some benchmarks they offer half the performance of the

slightly more expensive GTX 260 chipset.

Gigabyte's version of the GTS 250 is a rebadged 9800 GTX. This 1GB, overclocked offering doesn't carry the die-shrunk G92b GPU, but still sits on a redesigned circuitboard. Gigabyte have increased voltage stability, added a cooler to pull the GPU's temperature down, yet the card's clockspeed only comes in at 63MHz above the original 9800 GTX.

That said, the GTS 250 can compete with AMD's 4850. At lower resolutions the 4850 does well, but increase the pixel count and this GTS 250's extra

comes into use.

It's no real surprise then that NVIDIA have entered into this rebranding phase – they already had a card to compete with the mid-range of AMD boards, though inevitably consumers will go for the newer release every time. Sound thinking from a business side, and

possibly vital for NVIDIA's continued development.

Still, if you've got the sort of a monitor to make the most of high resolutions, save up and get a GTX

SPECIFICATION

GPU MODEL	G92a
CORE SPEED	783MHz
MEMORY	1GB GDDR3
RAM SPEED	100MHz

PALIT R700 REVOLUTION

PRICE £370 **MANUFACTURER** Palit Microsystems **WEBSITE** www.palit.biz

WE ALL KNOW about the 4870X2: it was AMD's beastly twin-GPU offering that stole the show at the high-end. It was this card, even more so than the 4850, that cemented AMD's return to form on the graphics front. So why should we care about an overclocked version, especially as the faster GTX295 is holding on the high-end market?

The interesting thing about Palit is that although it's not a big brand in the UK, it's huge in the East, selling more units than you've had spam emails. This means that its large production facilities allow it to redesign and manufacture its own versions of reference graphics cards. The R700 Revolution is one such model and comes with redesigned cooling.

The Revolution isn't clocked much higher than any other overclocked 4870X2, so you won't garner much in the way of performance benefit over a standard overclocked X2. But the point of this monstrosity is that its triple-slot design and twin-turbine cooler means it

runs quieter and cooler than its peers.

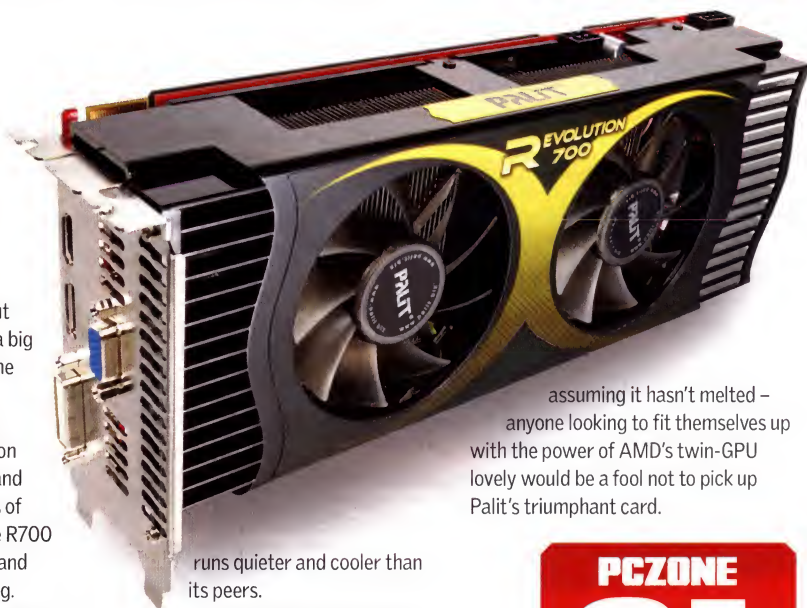
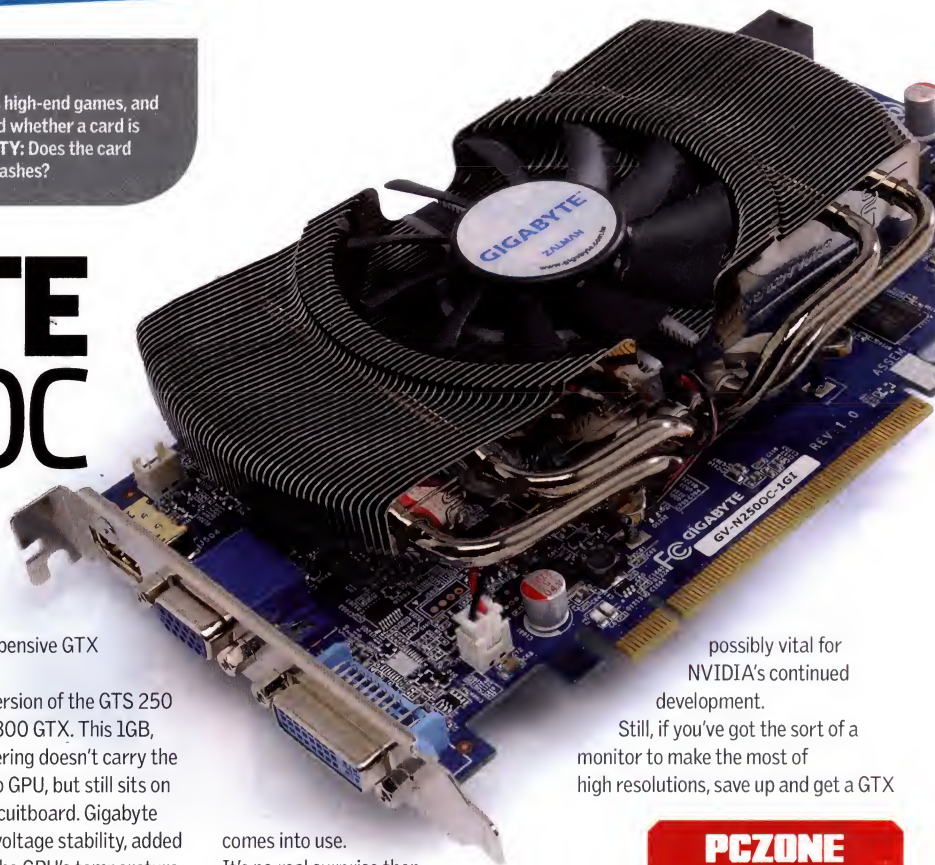
In our tests, Palit's R700 idled at 45°C and topped out at 69°C. ASUS' TOP edition ran at 75°C and 88°C respectively, so you can see the difference Palit's design brings.

While it's not worth making a switch if you've got an X2 card in your rig –

assuming it hasn't melted – anyone looking to fit themselves up with the power of AMD's twin-GPU lovely would be a fool not to pick up Palit's triumphant card.

SPECIFICATION

CPU MODEL	dual RV770
CORE SPEED	950MHz
MEMORY	2GB GDDR5
RAM SPEED	3,800MHz



PCZONE
74
Outdated tech

PCZONE
91
A beast of a card



GELID SILENT SPIRIT

PRICE £23 MANUFACTURER Gelid Microsystems WEBSITE gelidsolutions.com

WHILE RUNNING AN overclocked E6550 at full load the Spirit managed to stand firm at 52°C, three degrees lower than the more expensive, water-cooled cooler our test PC usually uses.

Unfortunately installation of this CPU cooler is just damn awkward, with twisty Intel clips buried under the heatsink, meaning that there's a good

chance of leaving some flesh behind if you come to try and get it out of your case.

But if you need a low-cost cooler, and you don't want H₂O in your PC, get the Silent Sprint.

PCZONE
84



CREATIVE SOUND BLASTER X-FI GO!

PRICE £30 MANUFACTURER Creative Microsystems WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

CREATIVE'S X-FI GO! promises to add high-quality sound to your netbook using the magic of USB. While the times when using the X-Fi Go! will benefit you are limited, the USB device does round out your MP3s, supports old games under Vista, and simulate 3D audio in games. While knocking up your processor usage by 25%.

For home use it could just about work – although a proper soundcard would be the best solution. If you're out and near a power point, it might come in handy. But the increase in CPU use means it's little use to gamers on the go.

PCZONE
61



COMPRO VIDEOMATE VISTA E800F

PRICE £64 MANUFACTURER Compro WEBSITE comprousa.com

THE E800F IS the perfect way to turn your PC into a media centre. It comes with plug-ins for *Microsoft Media Centre*, but Compro's DTV software is some of the best around. It's also one of the few solutions that can cope happily with multi-screen desktops too.

Sitting next to your TV, the E800F will turn a PC into a digital TV recorder.

A dual tuner means you can watch and record from two digital channels, while a wake function can boot your PC, record a program, and shut it down.

A great way to take a break from gaming.

PCZONE
85



WESTERN CAVIAR GREEN 2TB

PRICE £240 MANUFACTURER Western Digital WEBSITE wdc.com

THE CAVIAR GREEN delivers 2TB of data for £240. We can't work out how this was achieved, how this 5,200rpm model delivers 7,200rpm access speeds, and why it doesn't get above lukewarm. In short this is the biggest and most efficient hard disk drives available.

The ideal PC setup would be an OCZ solid-state hard drive for your *Windows*

installation and games, and the Caviar Green for backups, music and films. This would push the system cost above £500, but you'd have a very spacious machine capable of booting in jaw-dropping speeds.

PCZONE
88

Reviews by Dave James and Henry Winchester

REMEMBER:
EXORCISMS AND
SACRIFICES DO NOT
FIX COMPUTERS

If your PC starts doing odd things visit the *PC Zone* (pczone.co.uk) or *Dear Wandy* (dearwandy.com) forums for help. Don't call in a priest to drive out demons or build an altar and kill small animals while chanting your *Windows*' registry. That's what Wandy's for.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839
intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529
onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321
asus.com

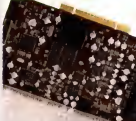


This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUND CARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144
auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99
seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

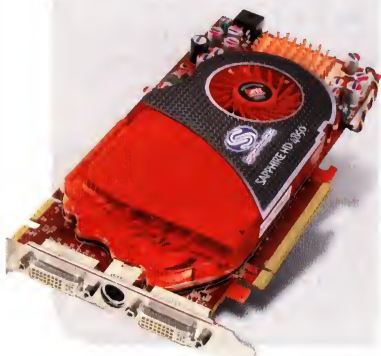
SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44
intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60
asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30
wdc.com

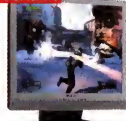


A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUND CARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

THE WORLD'S **NUMBER ONE** PC GAMES MAGAZINE

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PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

FALLING OUT

WE'VE HAD A look at a few super mod packs over on the *Extend* pages this month (pg. 100-101) and this got me thinking about why I can't get into *Fallout 3*. Everywhere you look, people are saying how amazing it is, how engrossing the world feels and blah blah. Yet all I'm getting is a face full of *Oblivion* again.

Now, *Oblivion* was great fun up until the Oblivion Gates made an appearance. These did my nut in so much that I just gritted my teeth and got through to the end, forever ruining the game for me in the process.

Now, does this explain why I just can't get into *Fallout 3*, because it's so similar to Bethesda's previous game? Does the fact that the same stupid conversation problems reoccur, as in when another character auto-talks to you, you'll often start chatting happily despite their being somebody else frozen right between the two of you, make memories of repetitive *Oblivion* gate encounters rush unchecked into my brain, tainting the experience? Does the fact VATS is just combat for dummies, despite looking cool, fail to grab me or involve me in the world?

Am I being too picky or does the fun kick in after a certain amount of play time has been accumulated? Whatever, I'm sure I'll keep plugging away (for professional reasons) but I can't say I've been anything other than bored by it so far. Maybe the huge collection of mods we've found for it will make things better. Don't forget you can tuck into them as well by using the shiny cover disc, along with the rather excellent Nazi Zombie maps for *Call of Duty: World at War*.

David Brown
Staff writer

Those bar benches aren't very comfortable.

Score: 0 of 222

Esc = help



1

There's no privacy anywhere nowadays.

Score: 0 of 222

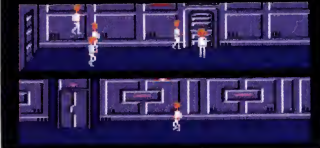
Esc = help



A goggle of Roger Wilcos.

Score: 0 of 222

Esc = help



LARRY GETS FIREFOXY

Sierra classics turned into browser-based MMOs

WEBSITE sarien.net

AT FIRST GLANCE nothing seems overly special about Sarien.net's browser ports of the original *Space Quest*, *Police Quest*, and *Leisure Suit Larry* games. All three are your basic conversions of old games into Java-based versions – complete with 16-bit big-pixel graphics, and type-until-your-fingers-bleed gameplay. Only Sapien.net's maker Martin Kool has added a neat twist – he's turned these single-player adventures into massively multiplayer online games.

Well "massively" is an exaggeration, with around 200-300 players being spread over the three game's many locations. While giving MMO *Larry* a run, there were usually about six to eight players in each location.

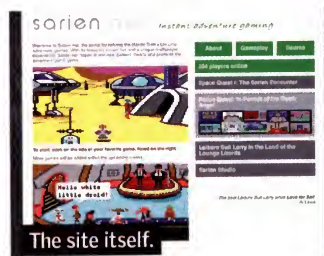
When you type in a command, it appears in a speech bubble above your Larry's head. Reading other players

commands will make you snigger or just despair at the stupidity of some gamers. With the occasional "Talk to blond" when there's no blonde in sight, or the "break down door lol". It's possible the speech bubbles could be used to chat to other players, but the other Larrys, Sonny and Rogers didn't seem chatty when we were there; instead they wandered around randomly, before fading out of existence.

Neither can you get much help with the game, given the general lack of IQ amongst the other players, indicated by

numerous "Open door" speech bubbles appearing over characters who were standing nowhere near a door.

While Kool's experiment with turning Sierra's classics into sort-of multiplayer browser games is interesting for Java coders, for gamers it's going to be less than fun. Trying to get Larry laid with a hooker while half-a-dozen clones stand around watching, isn't a fun way to spend your time. The site does give you links to Al Lowe's website though, which can be a fun way to spend your time.



The site itself.



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not Free!

0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

248
HOURS*

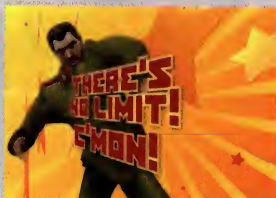
SNIPPETS



FLAT BACK TWO

This demo of the table football simulator *Foosball Maniac*, might bring back memories of cheap nights out at student union bars, or just random schoolyard kickabouts with kids who didn't want to play.

foosballmaniac.com



BEEN CAUGHT STALIN'

Mezmer Games have released trailers for *Stalin vs Martians*. One has Stalin urging everybody to dance, and doing so himself. The other features a young girl dancing between clips of gameplay.

stalinvsmartians.com/en



FRONT LINES

A week after Ziff Davis Media said they were closing FileFront, the site's original owners announced they'd bought the service back. This news broke on April Fool's Day, but it wasn't a bad joke.

filefront.com



CONAN GOES FREE

Prepare to don that loincloth as Funcom allow free *Conan* trials

WEBSITE ageofconan.com/trial

AS YOU MAY know, *Age of Conan* has seen better days. Subscriber numbers are falling and Funcom, the company behind the MMO, has been haemorrhaging money and jobs left, right and centre. It's a sad state of affairs, caused by a number of factors: a lack of end-game content, an ambitious combat model, relentless ganking by experienced players on newbies, and so on.

Following in the footsteps of every other major MMO publisher, the remaining members of the Funcom family have decided to make a free trial available in a bid to entice new players into the fold. This offer lasts for only seven days at present and it does also have restrictions. One of these is the inability to trade with others, which might seem strange but restricts devious scoundrels from populating the game with multiple new accounts and exploiting things.

However, two other restrictions might not go down well with new players. First of all, trialists will not be allowed to post on forums, which might just be one of the dumbest restrictions we've ever seen. Forums are the first place, other than the immediate vicinity your character is in, new players will go for information. Now, Funcom haven't said that you won't be able to read or access the forums, you just won't be able to post anything.

"Most of *Conan's* best material will be available to new players"

We can see some kind of logic here: perhaps they are worried about the forums being spammed by new players asking "ware iz da btnn fer da sword hitt thng?" but, for legitimate questions, this restriction is too draconian. Funcom will be hoping FAQs and other forum threads will answer any questions people might

have, something that is probably correct. However, if this isn't the case, it's hardly going to tempt you to keep playing.

Also, new players won't be able to use in-game mail. This may not be something newcomers will be thinking about. Of course if you upgrade to a paying account, these restrictions go away, but most of *Conan's* best material will be available to new players in their first week.

At least this free trial shows a willingness on the part of Funcom to

extend the game to new players, but whether this trial is the MMO equivalent of flogging a dead horse, well, that's for the fates to decide.

We don't want *Age of Conan* to die, so we're hoping the game will live on and see better days. Perhaps this will be the start.



Y'GOT BLOOD ON MY KNIFE, MATE

Valve announce next *TF2* class update will focus on the Sniper

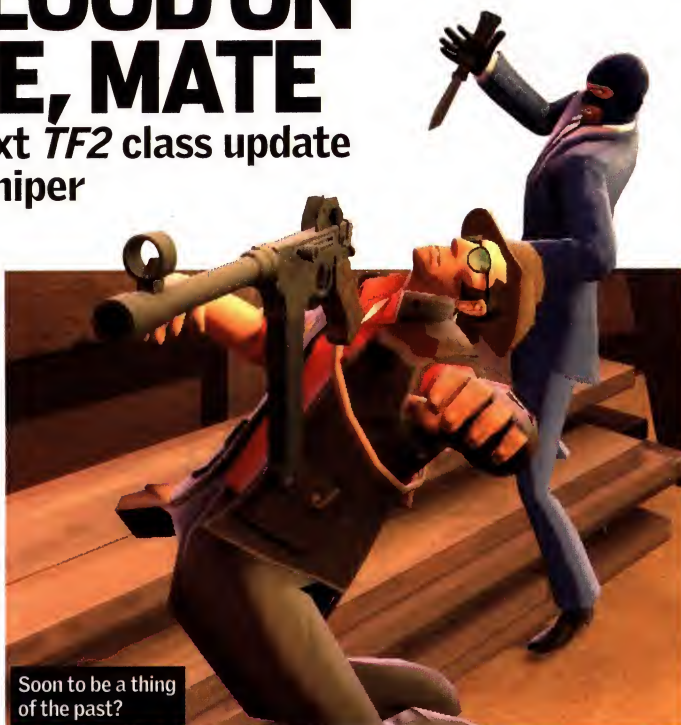
WEBSITE teamfortress.com

OVER ON THE official *Team Fortress 2* blog site, Greg Cherlin has seen fit to announce the "largest *Team Fortress 2* update yet", which will primarily focus on doing to the Sniper class what has already been done to the Medic, Heavy, Pyro and Scout. Fear not though, any non-students of the ranged rifle, it won't all be Sniper-based material. There'll also be "multiple new maps and gameplay tweaks."

"In addition, we've got another update in the works that should be done before the Sniper, and that one will include some new content for all classes," Cherlin writes.

If one ignores the inevitable hell of virtually every single server turning into the *TF2* equivalent of a *Counter-Strike* AWP map, then this news is welcome to players. The faster Valve begin to churn out the updates, the better, as far as we're concerned.

So what will Valve be putting in the Sniper update then? We hesitate to speculate, but we would hazard a guess at perhaps a more powerful or effective close-combat weapon to replace the submachine gun, and perhaps the ability to slow down or temporarily cripple enemies with a shot to the legs. We'll just have to wait and see what delights Valve will be bringing us next.



Soon to be a thing of the past?



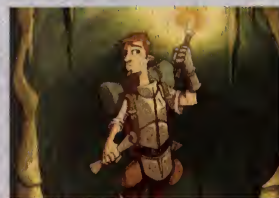
"Stay still, yer wanker!"

SNIPPETS



FOOLISH APRIL

One of the only April Fool's jokes to come close to being vaguely amusing was about *TF2*. Valve said the forthcoming Sniper update would allow the rifle man to wield a jar of urine to confuse his enemies. teamfortress.com



RETURN TO ZORK

One of the finest text adventures has been redone as a browser-based persistent RPG. Launched on April Fool's day, the game's release wasn't a lie, although the game is a joke. legendsofzork.com

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
GRAND THEFT
AUTO IV: VERSION
1.0.3.0 PATCH

"Missing hot dog vendors, fences, gates, pylons should be present."

MATCH OF THE DAY

Team-based Versus matching coming to *L4D*

WEBSITE l4d.com

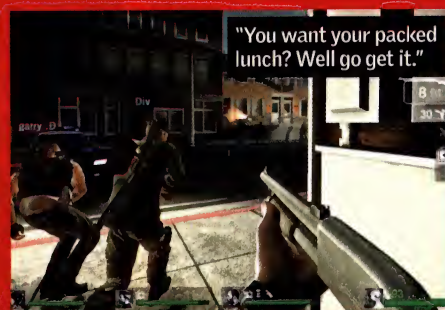
VALVE CAN'T REST after releasing *L4D*'s *Survival Pack*, having a long "to do" list to work on. Two of the most important points on their list are team-based matchmaking in Versus mode and player skill matching.

"To support the SDK, we are extending the matchmaking system to allow for third-party campaigns," Valve have stated on their blog. "We'll be adding extra features so players will be able to find dedicated servers running the campaigns they've installed. They will also be able to see friends playing

third-party campaigns, and be directed to download them as necessary.

"We're also revamping our player matching based on skill level. Currently the system tries to match people with the same skill level and best pings together. We will be revisiting this system to tweak it based on data we have collected.

"Another major feature we are planning to add is team-based Versus matching. This will allow two teams of four to locate each other and compete in a Versus match."



Demos



Adam Glick checks out what's on this issue's DVD



WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

What exactly is a weapon of fate anyway?

WEBSITE thewanted.warnerbros.com

IF YOU ENJOYED the movie with Angelina, then you won't enjoy the game – you can't even ogle Angelina as you play the thing. Still, never mind, stiff upper lip and all that.

In this demo, you'll be learning the basics of curving bullets and combat (i.e. running between all the different forms of cover). The meat of the game takes place on the Fear of Flying level, which sees you controlling Cross (the protagonist's father) in flashbacks to his career as an assassin.

This time out, he's on a plane and there are a surprising number of bad guys waiting for their heads to be blown off. What you are getting with this demo is an excellent example of the game as a whole. On the other hand, you're probably seeing the best the game has to offer, so it's only downhill from here.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



SNEAK-Y

You start off infiltrating a plane, having snuck onboard in a previous level. Your enemies aren't aware of your existence, but that won't last long.



SHOOT-Y

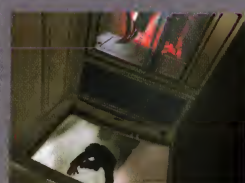
Work your way through the plane, shooting out the various bad(der) guys as you head to the cockpit and your goal: the Immortal, the man who tried to kill your kid.

HOT CROSS BUNS



MAX PAYNE-Y

Take out the enemies in the slow-mo bullettime mode, making sure to shoot the bullet as well as the man who fired it. Do this and you'll escape in no time.



DECOMPRESS-Y

Everything's gone tits up and the plane is tearing itself to pieces. Everyone is either falling out to their deaths or hanging on for dear life... until you gun them down.

WALLACE & GROMIT: FRIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEES

Yorkshire's finest tea fans are here

WEBSITE telltalegames.com

IF YOU WEREN'T accepting of our *Wallace & Gromit* review in the last issue, perhaps because we took a non-fan's view of the game, now is your chance to judge for yourself.



Telltale have given you all the ability to play through the tutorial and some of the first parts of the game, which means you get to control both Wallace and his canine pal, going about their business and trying to solve a curious situation involving honey, bees, steroids and a rogue robot that has terrorised a nearby convenience store.

All in a day's work for this not-quite dynamic duo, we hear. Anyway, take a look to see if we were wrong or not.

THE TERRIBLE TWO



WALLACE

Our madcap hero has his work cut out this time, as two of his inventions are on the blink.



GROMIT

Wallace's doggy sidekick has to come to his master's rescue on many an occasion.

THE MAW

The mouth that devours all

WEBSITE mawgame.com

WHAT'S THAT PHRASE about leading a horse to water? Well, regardless of that, you can definitely lead a Maw to water and watch it devour all life contained within.

Our purple-headed monster will eat anything that crosses its path, even

stuff it shouldn't. Your job, as the little blue alien that leads the Maw around is to ensure he eats his fill of creatures on the colourful maps, as well as those that have antagonistic intent. There are also some that damage the Maw, but give him powers when gobbled.



1. THE MAW

Devouring anything he sees, the Maw is both cute and deadly, though not to Frank.

2. FRANK

A Teltarian, he is the only thing the Maw appears not to want to eat.

3. LANDSCAPE...

The game has a stylised look to it that might appeal if you are of the right kind of mindset.

ON THE BLOB



GASTRO

Made of molten rock and other fiery material and mixed with water, these enable our hero to use fire to his own advantage.



PUFF-TOR...

These guys float high above the map and, if the Maw eats one, he can also gain this ability.

BEST OF THE REST



Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



THE WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

The game is dire, but it can still deliver a few fun co-op adventures. Just be sure to lower your expectations. watchmenvideogame.com



NEO STEAM

This is the client software for Gamigo's new free-to-play steampunk MMO. Try it out - you may like. neosteam.gamigo.com



FLOCK!

You too can now herd cute and cuddly little sheep about colourful levels in this *Lemmings*-a-like from Capcom and Proper Games.

capcom-europe.com/games/Flock-PC



PIRATE GALAXY

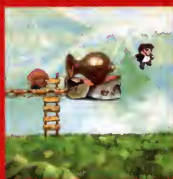
This is another game from Gamigo. This space-based MMO that probably won't be a rival to *EVE Online*, but will definitely be easier to play. pirate-galaxy.gamigo.com

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

BRAID

Steve loved *Braid* and now you have the chance to get involved with its curious blend of time manipulation and platform-jumping action. It could be one that splits opinion. See which side you are on.

braid-game.com



AND YET IT MOVES

Steve didn't like this one as much, but for fans of paper and its multitude of uses, it might be worth a shot. Spin the world to make your paper man tumble about the place. This demo may yet charm you.

andyetitmoves.net



Freeware

Laurance Elliott isn't paid, so he loves free games



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Freeware is so good at bringing you free games that other magazines' freeware sections are ashamed to even be sold in the same stores.

This month, explore a leafy and pleasant land where leaping and jumping isn't frowned upon, take on the world in the realm of high politics and nuclear arsenals, push a red star onto flat platforms without mentioning Serbian football teams, use a shotgun for profit, and learn the meaning of the verb 'transmove'.

Not quite a shooting star.



RED STAR FALL

DEVELOPER zedarus

WEBSITE snipurl.com/redstarfall

PHYSICS-BASED PUZZLE games are now littering the web. Huzzah! And with *Portal* now rinsed for every drop of enjoyment possible I must now turn to said internet to quench my thirst for physics-based frolicking. This little beauty is an excellent starting point for anyone who has up to this point remained angry and perplexed at the myriad of free physics puzzlers available.

Short but sweet, *Red Star Fall* has you guiding a red star to the flat platform beneath it to complete the level. To do this you must remove the striped blocks, one after the other, making sure the star safely reaches the bottom without falling over the side. If you've ever played *Totem Destroyer* or *Tumbledrop*, it is a fairly streamlined and slightly more responsive remake of those. The visuals are simpler and the music is more relaxing, so this is the definitive choice out of the three.

Red Star Fall is fairly easy, however, and with only 15 stages this shouldn't take any longer than 20 minutes. There is definitely potential for more complex and creative levels and it is a shame that the difficulty was so low. Fingers crossed for a level creator.



Olek: the world's first poleless pole-vaulter.

NEVERMORE 3

If only the real world was like this

DEVELOPER Adam Westerman WEBSITE snipurl.com/nevermore

BEING A RELATIVE adventure game noob (the last proper one I played was LucasArts' 1998 classic *Grim Fandango*, back when they weren't purely concerned with endlessly churning out crappy *Star Wars* titles) trawling through the reams of free adventure games on the web is a daunting and overwhelming process. I'm therefore particularly proud of myself for finding this little gem, which even grizzled adventure connoisseurs may appreciate.

As far as platform adventurers go it's a fairly simple and linear endeavour. You assume control of a hero named Olek, who must search for the treasure that will save his village.

The plot is purposefully thin and the adventure only really consists of a few fetch quests, so it shouldn't take any longer than an hour to finish. Visually, however, the game is beautiful. The highly stylised characters and levels have the quirkiness of Tim Burton's creations and the charm of a Pixar movie, making the lack of a meaty story a flaw that's easy to forget.

This isn't a game that hinges on a compelling plot, as the narrative is simply there to guide you through and supplement the alluring world and unusual characters (which look suspiciously similar to the giant rat in *The Moomins*). However, interactions with these other characters is a

disappointingly limited affair. The dialogue is fittingly oddball, but it would have enriched the experience a lot had there been more of it. Similarly, the inclusion of a couple of response choices and simple conversation trees would have fleshed out the idiosyncrasies of the characters, the exploration of which would have added a bit of a variety to what can sometimes be repetitive gameplay. You'll spend most of your time running and jumping about from A to B, fetching items so you can get to C. This repetitious formula is easy to forgive when you consider that the simplistic gameplay is merely there as a practical tool for you to enjoy the seductive visuals.

As far as independent releases go, this is a genuinely fun way of wasting an hour and certainly has a place on anyone's desktop.

"The lack of a meaty story is a flaw that's easy to forget"

DOOM

Take a trip down memory lane

DEVELOPER 'Mike' WEBSITE snipurl.com/doom_browser

THE GAME THAT started it all, that popularised the FPS genre and pioneered immersive 3D graphics and networked multiplayer gaming as we know it, is playable in your web browser! Now take a moment to let that mind-blowing news sink in before you read on. OK... ready?

Back in the day when games came on packs of floppy disks and 4MB of RAM was considered a lot, the world was taken by storm when id Software's landmark first-person shooter was distributed as shareware and downloaded by an estimated 10 million people. Doom spawned a gaming subculture, and its engine went on to be used as a platform to build id Software's Quake engine, versions of

which are still being used today.

You get to play through all three of the gruelling episodes, where you'll blast your way through possessed soldiers and hellish creatures such as fireball-hurling imps and those pink rhino-ape things that can sometimes turn invisible.

So if you have never played Doom before, and have only ever heard or read pompous old fanboys like us worship it as the great-granddaddy of all shooters, go and pay your respects and play it. Now. Lest the gaming gods smite you for your heresy.

Even after so many years away, *Doom* provides a superbly pure and satisfying blasting experience, one that will probably never get old.

Doom's shotgun, how we love thee.



Doom's graphic violence and gore was notorious.



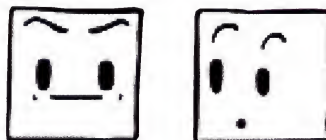
Ah, memories.



BALANCE OF POWER: 21ST CENTURY

Walk in Bush's shoes

DEVELOPER Chris Crawford WEBSITE snipurl.com/balance2k

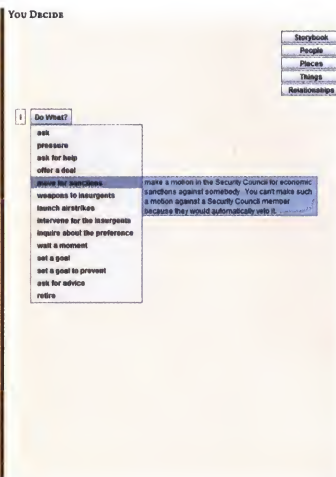


EVER WONDERED WHAT would have happened if Bush decided to nuke Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks? *Balance of Power: 21st Century* gives you this option, amongst a selection of less abhorrent choices. This is an incredibly detailed Storyworld game that consists purely of text and places you in charge of the US straight after the Al-Qaeda bombings.

Once you have chosen your initial goal, which ranges from freeing Tibet to preventing Iran from building a centrifuge facility, you make diplomatic and military decisions to achieve it in the shortest time possible. Doing this is an incredibly difficult balancing act, as one wrong move can isolate you from your allies and make achieving your goals even harder.

BOP2K is a hugely original and ambitious idea and anyone who has jumped on the anti-Bush bandwagon should play it to see how hugely difficult international politics can be.

So if you think Obama has it easy repairing all the monumental cock-ups of the Bush administration, you can see for yourself that bombing Afghanistan is a really, really bad idea.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



TRANSMOVER

DEVELOPER Polygon Gmen WEBSITE polig.daa.jp/tmvr.html

IF YOU'VE BEEN keeping up with PC Zone's Twittering you'll have noticed a link posted to an "awesome thing". Said awesome thing is *Transmover*, an ingenious puzzle game from the guys at Polygon Gmen.

You have to make your way to an unreachable exit, using your ability to fire beams at coloured blocks that cause you to swap places with them. This sounds simple but the 60 standard stages, and hundreds of other user-made stages, can be infuriating. But they are satisfying to complete.

There's plenty of fun to be had on this addictive puzzler, so keep checking our Twitter page and we'll keep you posted on all the new and exciting ways to waste your time.

FREEPLAYEXTEND

Extend



David Brown checks on the latest mods, maps and add-ons



FALLOUT 3 MOD PACK 2.0

It isn't just nudity, you know

WEBSITE snipurl.com/falloutmodpack3 MOD FOR Fallout 3

KICKING OFF OUR mod-pack round-up is this huge *Fallout 3* collection that, while containing its fair share of mods that are complete balls, does actually include more decent ones than you might consider usual. Also, it's much easier to look at the

burgeoning *Fallout 3* mod scene this way, because most of them are too small to be worth covering on their own. So, enough explaining our selection processes, on to the mods themselves.

If something has irked you about *Fallout 3*, it's probably been fixed in this pack. The most important mods come in the form of boosts and gameplay changes. Boosts, as you might have guessed, change the effects objects have on your character (and NPCs). Some of the ones here include the Mighty Mouse perk, which gives you a better weight limit, and Barkskin, which makes you less susceptible to damage. Gameplay mods change things like the

pace of levelling up, increased water radiation, a level cap of 40 and even adds a "turn-based simulator".

More aesthetic changes have also been crammed in, ones that change the Pip-Boy, the music and the monsters, for example. Your own character also gets a look-in, with various uniform and armour texture changes. And, of course, there's room for the pervert in us all, with a bumper collection of female texture changes. These include an underwear removal mod, so you can take on the beasts of the wasteland wearing nothing but some frilly panties.

There's going to be something for everyone here – the hardcore will enjoy

the addition of higher level caps and slower levelling, while us mere mortals will like going into battle wielding an aluminium baseball bat. There's even the worst character model we've ever seen – a Chuck Norris skin that looks as convincing as a Conservative MP. So if there wasn't enough full-frontal nudity in your post-apocalyptic radiation-soaked gaming, you might want to see what this mod pack has to offer.

The Mod Pack also includes two useful mod managers. Without them it can get tough to remember which tweaks you've installed, as a lot of the texture and character model mods use files with the same names.





Rammstein's latest video shoot.

ZOMBIE MAP PACK

The world's at war (with zombies)

WEBSITE snipurl.com/cod4zombies MOD FOR Call of Duty: World at War

ALTHOUGH THE INCLUSION of the Nazi Zombie mode in *Call of Duty: World at War* was very welcome, it had two major flaws: it was clearly an attempt to

steal *Left 4 Dead*'s thunder (which didn't work), and it only had one map.

Thankfully, the modding community has made up for this glaring fault. This

pack contains 28 of the best Nazi Zombie maps doing the rounds on the internet. Some of them are pretty badly textured and designed, but some are really very good indeed, demonstrating a real talent for design flair and level pacing. This is especially important in the unwinnable Nazi Zombies mode, because a badly designed level will just be boring to play.

Some of the maps featured here include a semi-beach defence backing into a church, a mansion that is assailed on all sides by undead Germans and a subway that has to be defended against the ghoulish Nazi menace.

There are a couple of duffers, though. The one where you start in a small hut in

a field is particularly rubbish, as is the one where you are defending another reasonably small building (a pattern here?) which appears to exist in a universe all of its own.

However, as a diversion from the main *World at War* multiplayer, these maps do the trick for short periods rather nicely.



Spooky.

STALKER: SUPER MOD PACK

The Zone just got deadlier

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/super-mod-pack MOD FOR STALKER Shadow of Chernobyl

THIS MOD PACK was temporarily housed on some slow Megaupload sources, due to the temporary demise of Filefront. Thankfully, it should be available again on the latter site, so you won't have to wrestle with Megaupload's unfriendly interface to get it.

Anyway, the base of this pack is the excellent *Oblivion Lost*, which delivers the definitive *STALKER* experience (realistic guns,

night that's dark, and vehicles). However, it also adds other things, including overhauled weather and the Argus texture package.

Other inclusions are various weapon tweaks (such as changing the scopes), and an ambient audio enhancement mod, which improves the aural experience of the Zone.

While most of these mods are average, *Oblivion Lost* makes up for any letdowns.

Get out of here, stalkers!

KILLING FLOOR

Co-operative infected-splatting fun

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/killing-floor MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 2004

WE FEATURED THIS one a long time ago, but as news has reached us that it is to be made into a standalone game, we thought we'd take another look.

One thing that this highlights is how rough the *UT2004* engine is looking now, but improvements have been made across the board in the gameplay. The community does have its fair share of idiots though, with new players not being made welcome (as we found), but if you have a couple of friends with a dusty copy of *UT2004* somewhere, this co-op zombie shooter is great fun, if a tad confusing initially.

We'll be keeping an eye on the development of this mod's commercial release, as it might provide some competition for *Left 4 Dead*.



The world's first undead boy band.

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



RETURN TO SEXY WOLFENSTEIN

WEBSITE snipurl.com/sexywolfenstein
MOD FOR Return to Castle Wolfenstein

If the law ever recognises Crimes Against Modding then the makers of this atrocity would be strung up by their testicles and flayed alive with a penknife. This mod changes the clothes of the "Nazi Chicks" in *RTCW* into "sexy underwears". May God have mercy on us all.

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

The times they are a-changin', as Bob Dylan once sang. He could almost have been talking about the way we've tweaked these here pages, with Fight Club becoming more prominent than before, than discussing the social upheavals of the '60s. We'd like to think he was specifically and solely talking about Online Zone, as we're clearly more important than cultural revolutions and flower power.

FIGHT CLUB

When competitions go wrong



NOTE TO TEAM: The next time we announce a competition involving shooting David in the head, we must specify that his own teammates are not rewarded by doing it.

If you're wondering what this is about, you must have missed the "Headshot David to win prizes!" competition in this month's *Counter-Strike: Source* Fight Club. Naturally, people entered into the spirit of despicable antics and disgraceful behaviour by viciously capping David as he spawned on numerous occasions.

Other than that, a good time was had by all (well, everyone except David) although tempers were frayed due to the nature of the game. This wasn't helped by Steve's decision to make the first map we played a little-known user-created job called *de_irishcastle*, which turned out to be badly designed and just a bit rubbish.

After this, more familiar maps were our battlegrounds, including *cs_office*, *de_dust2* and *de_piranasi*. Dust 2 was where the headshot fun began in earnest, with the *PCZ* staff being on minus scores for a substantial period of time because of internecine warfare at the spawn point.

To be honest, we lost count of who won the competition, but we think it was Useful Dave, who teamkilled David twice at the beginning of Dust 2. Honourable mentions (or should that



"A good time was had by all (well, everyone except David)"

be dishonourable?) go to the plainly named Mark and the less-sensibly monikered Wacky Wombat.

Finally, there was one specifically comical moment that emerges from our murky memories. Picture the scene: an irate Steve, angered by his own ineptitude and the constant team-wounding he had to suffer, standing on his own inside the building just outside bombsite B.

Add Fight Club regular Flatline to that image, running in innocently up the staircase. Steve turns, blinded by rage, and viciously executes his unwitting ally with an AK47 spray to the face.

David enters stage left, witnessing the atrocity. Emitting his most earnest '80s action movie

"N0000000!" scream, he takes revenge and plants an AWP round in the back of Steve's skull.

Thus, two members of the *PCZ* staff were forced to sit out the next round, to the amusement of the other players.

All of this jolliness took place on our Multiplay (gameservers.multiplay.co.uk) servers, the details of which you can see to your right. Anyone who turned up, after the initial map merry-go-round, can testify to the stability and smoothness of the game we had, so we're pretty pleased with how they're running. We also have complete control over what maps and materials go on there, so if you've got a hankering for some *fy_iceworld*, why not drop us a line and we might just get right on it.

We'll see you again next month for some online japery, the likes of which you will almost certainly never have seen before.

PCZONE 2009 ON THE BLOG



OUR TWITTER FOLLOWING

continues to grow exponentially, an army of willing digital slaves hanging on our very nonsensical word. We even managed to confuse somebody with a quick mention of sludgecore, that wonderful brutal-yet-slow mix of doom metal and hardcore. We also spoke about a terrible *Incredible Hulk* mod for *GTA4*, one which comprises a bad green re-skin for Niko and... that's it. Modders - please try harder.

Steve managed to spot a teddy bear in one of the *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 2* trailers that've been doing the rounds. What animals have you seen unexpectedly in games? Why not get on Twitter and tell us?

Elsewhere, we got a little bit worried by Epic's planned introduction of *Tron's* Master Control Program into the *Unreal Engine*. Visions of David Warner-voiced catastrophes all over computer land swam in front of our eyes, but Bruce Boxleitner helped us out in the nick of time and we survived intact. We still don't like the idea of any kind of corporate snooping though.

Follow this and comments just like it on our Twitter feed at twitter.com/pczone or visit our website at pczone.co.uk.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

What would be your perfect game?

MADAMEYE: Describe the perfect PC game for you. Or describe what you feel would be the perfect PC game. You could just say *Planescape: Torment* in 3D and have done with the topic.

THE STALKING HEAD: My perfect game would be what I expected *Spore* to be: a god game where you design a world, and you can travel forward and backwards in time to shape its evolution. It would use realism as much as possible, including chemistry etc.

GAVPOWELL: After having just rediscovered it I'd say it already exists as *Cannon Fodder*. Innovative design, varied levels, increasing difficulty, doesn't take itself seriously and, in its own way, very realistic. What more could you ask for?

BRAX: A sci-fi survival horror game akin to *System Shock 2*... but with the twist of *STALKER*'s original concept – that the game world progresses regardless of the player.

JOW00: A space sim/RPG/FPS that allows you to seamlessly land on and take-off from planets. Basically *Freelancer* combined with the open-world gaming of *STALKER* or *Far Cry 2*.

SUNSCRAMBLE: The gameplay and setting of *Deus Ex* mixed with the level of content, open-world and massively multiplayer approach of *World of Warcraft*. And yeah, the spacey bits of *Elite*. And T-rexes with saddles.

CAFF: Hello to my perfect game: *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*. It had loads of saucy cleavage in.

DUKEM737: *BioShock* is near perfect, in my opinion. Sorry guys, I just enjoyed it more than *System Shock 2*. I'm gonna need a riot shield now, huh?

LIQUID_METAL: On a related note, *Battlefield 1943: Pacific* sounds horrible. It's like they made a list of everything that made the first games great and then scrapped it all.



ZONE CHAT

Metal up your arse



METAL WAS ONE of the major topics in a distinctly un-gamey Zone Chat this month.

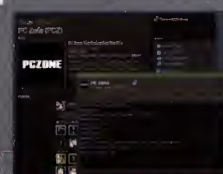
Burgethebeardedwonder spent almost the entire time extolling the virtues of various metal bands, backed up by David and Demios. Mr Bungle, Pungent Stench, Meshuggah, Strapping Young Lad – all these and more were discussed. Faith No More's upcoming reunion shows were also mentioned. Don't worry though, it wasn't all hard rock.

Ciaranisco said he believed *GTA: San Andreas* has better multiplayer features than *GTA4* (we presume he meant the *Multi Theft Auto* mod) while Chris Barrie's voice acting was praised in an impromptu discussion of the original *Simon the Sorcerer*.

On a more serious note, the charmingly named Empire Total War Kicks Yo Ass lamented the lack of a dedicated headset for the PC, in the vein of the current Xbox 360 one. There are very good headsets for PCs, but what he meant was that there needed to be a standard.

Student loans have apparently also been deposited in people's accounts, as a few were discussing what they could blow their money on. Cheezymon, for example, wants to waste it all on a new monitor.

The last word was had by Burgethebeardedwonder, who calmly declared that "Wayne Static is awful, he sounds constipated". Too true, brother.



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: **PC ZONE (PCZ)**. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're in Nevada in search of alien cadavers – then join other readers on these public servers. The PCZ team may even join in from time to time.

WHO'S WHO

Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
David Brown [PCZ]plughead

BATTLEFIELD 2

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CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

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COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY

STEVE'S VISIT TO Cryptic to see *Star Trek Online* (issue 207) put us on a course to Cestus III... I mean a look back at *Star Trek* games from the past. And what better game to scan with our tricorders on than *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*?

These days *Star Trek* games focus on ship-to-ship combat, but as a point-and-

click adventure *Anniversary* was about the dialogue and the characters, capturing the feel of the original series.

The game was set up to follow the format of the TV show as much as possible. Each chapter was self-contained, functioning like an individual episode from the series. All the usual suspects cropped up, such as the

Klingons and Romulans, plus a bunch of lads called the Elasi Pirates, who capture the USS Masada and force the Enterprise's crew to figure out a way of defeating them and rescuing the ship.

In each episode then, you'd be told of a problem by Starfleet Command and told to solve it as peacefully as possible. Each mission would be evaluated according to how you finished it, resulting in a score and rating from your superiors. Finding the nicest way to bring about a resolution would lead to high scores, but go around blasting

people and the top brass wouldn't be pleased. Still, in allowing players to do this, the game tapped into the original series' wilder nature. Diplomacy wasn't forced on you like in *A Final Unity* (the *Next Generation*'s adventure title).

Best of all, the CD version (*25th Anniversary Enhanced*) used the voices of the original cast, including the late DeForest Kelly in one of his final roles.

Anniversary's legacy is a sad one, as there'll never be another *Star Trek* game like it again; unless Cryptic really pull a wonder out with *Star Trek Online*.



But how? Getting back with Kirk and co.

If you want to snuggle under a big blanket and settle back with a bit of Jim Kirk and the chaps, you'll surely want to be using *DOSBox*. See if you can find the *Enhanced* version if possible, because the cast's voices really do add to the experience.

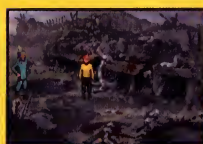
However, doing this while remaining within the law is difficult. There are numerous abandonware sites scattered about the ether, but we couldn't possibly

recommend you stoop to that nefarious level in order to play this great game.

dosbox.com
the site of reliable old *DOSBox*.

thehouseofgames.net
Some more information on the game, but we can't talk about what else you might do when you get there.

To Go Boldly Six of the best (and worst) other *Star Trek* games out there



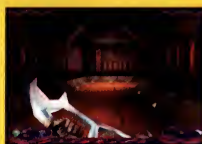
1 JUDGMENT RITES

Anniversary's brilliant sequel took 90 minutes to install from 11 floppy disks.



2 A FINAL UNITY

The *Next Generation* crew's adventure was an excellent game on the whole, but it was buggy.



3 KLINGON HONOUR GUARD

This *Unreal*-powered bat'leth-'em-up game didn't live up to its potential.



4 ELITE FORCE

A not-bad FPS that let you kill Neelix in a holodeck deathmatch, which was more than welcome.



5 DS9: HARBINGER

The quality of this game was uniquely summed up in this very magazine with the words "Deep Cack Poo".



6 BRIDGE COMMANDER

Tried to simulate ship-to-ship combat in *Star Trek*, but it was a bit dull.

Now & Then

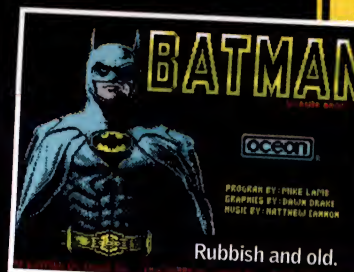
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM vs BATMAN: THE MOVIE



Shiny and new.

DESPITE EVERYONE GOING bat-shit crazy over *The Dark Knight*, I've got a soft spot for Michael Keaton's *Batman*. And not just because Jack Nicholson pisses all over Heath Ledger's Joker from a great height.

Despite this, *Arkham Asylum* is shaping up nicely – a sort of Riddick-with-a-cape sort of thing. Will it be better than Ocean Software's gaming adaptation of the Keaton-era *Batman* though? Almost certainly. While *Your Sinclair* once gave *Batman: The Movie* 91%, it's clear this game is of a different era – one where shoddy platforming and dull Batmobile-driving sections were all the rage. We demand more from our games than leaping about on platforms and knocking the Joker into some chemical waste on the first level. But not much more.



Rubbish and old.

Play it! How to get retro-Bats on your PC

- 1 Load up World of Spectrum (www.worldofspectrum.org), which makes the game available for playing in your browser window, along with other Spectrum classics.
- 2 You could re-enact the game and/or the film by dressing up as Batman and convincing a friend to dress up as a clown and let you beat him up a great deal.
- 3 You could phone up some people who used to work at Ocean Software and hope they have a spare copy and a Spectrum 128k lying about. This is unlikely though.
- 4 You could <insert another tedious joke about going back in time/> into your attic/to a car boot sale and playing the game on a Spectrum/286 PC/386 PC or whatever>.

MAMEframe SONIC PROTOTYPE



SEGA'S CERULEAN HEDGEHOG has more games than smutty fan fiction novelettes, but you'd be startled and frightened at the number of not-so-secret, unreleased prototype games around that can be played on *Mame*.

This one sees the mascot scoot about in an isometric world, avoiding Doctor Robotnik's nefarious traps and repeatedly running into fires and putting his face on spikes.

Every level seems to crumble behind Sonic as he runs, creating the sense that the machine is some ravenous, impatient coin-beast. Successfully complete a level and you're rewarded with a small animation of Robotnik throwing a tantrum.

This game is worth playing for the angry Japanese voiceover alone.



Back in the day



WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

By David Brown

THE MAIN MEMORY I have of this game is a section where you have to break some slabs. With each successful break more appeared, until it was physically impossible to hammer the buttons quickly enough to break the pile.

However, now I'm not sure this awesome karate simulator was the one that had this brick-slapping challenge in it. It could have been *International Karate+*.

I never got to play the non-Spectrum versions of *Fist*, so I didn't get to see the terrible charging bull section. Neither did I get to beat my way through the charmingly risqué *Fist 2*, which wasn't the same as the first game, so never mind. Oh, in case you were wondering, *Way of the Exploding Fist* was a karate fighting game.



What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.



Jesus Christ!
Run, Sonic! Run!

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Trying his best: **Steve Hogarty**

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN whining about *Empire: Total War's* AI, in particular its inability to launch naval invasions. Put a good 10 hours into Creative Assembly's bar-height-maintaining RTS and you might just notice that your island nation is invulnerable to attack. I never noticed this, mind you, because I'm rubbish at *Empire*. I was rubbish at *Rome*, and at

Medieval, and now in the spirit of unshakable tradition I am great big hairy balls at *Empire*.

It's the same old problem. I know perfectly well that the guys who can shoot the farthest should go at the back, and running around the side of the enemy is called "flanking" and that it's good. I even know about square formations, having read the incredible



"Glug, glug, glug..."

World War Z (sure they were fighting zombies and not people on horseback, but the principle is the same – if not more pronounced – when facing millions of relentless, unfaltering corpses). But it comes to naught when I sit in front of a keyboard and mouse.

Who's fault is that? Most people would say, "you, Steve," but I'm inclined to disagree. Creative Assembly have

been running with the same RTS formula for a long time now, and for years I've tried to get into *Total War* games without success. Everybody I know who's enjoying the game found their entry point some years back. I've yet to meet somebody who, coming from a non-RTS background, has picked up *Empire: Total War* and found it anything but hideously inaccessible.

But would I rather they drag *Empire* down to a point where the masses "get it"? Not at all. I love that there are still games around that confound me. I can only hope to ever love this game enough to even recognise that there are problems with it, but until then I'll simply enjoy being treated rough.

VERDICT Masochist's delight

The Ottomans face off against the Spanish.

"Would I rather they drag *Empire* down to a point where the masses 'get it'? Not at all"



SPELUNKY

Going deeper underground: **Adam Glick**

I DIDN'T REALISE that I loved *Spelunky* until I died, restarted, and found that the first level of the cave I was exploring had changed.

Levels in *Spelunky* are randomly generated, which in my eyes makes it

a two-dimensional *Rogue*-like, an adventure platformer in every sense of the words. Your tiny character is so fragile, and his surroundings so dangerous, that every inch deeper is felt like a deep and gratifying lungful

Getting in the Comic Relief mode.



of air. The tools you're given are so useful, rather than outwardly powerful, that the mere act of thinking about having to use them makes you feel worryingly clever.

Almost every object you encounter can be grabbed, carried and thrown. Carry a damsel in distress to the exit for mega bonus points, or when needs must, chuck her down a chasm to trigger a poison dart trap. Grab a ancient totem and you'll be chased by a boulder, in an Indiana Jones style.

Throw that totem at a snake to kill it, then whip a caveman in the head to stun him while you set up an escape rope. These are the things you do in *Spelunky*, and they're the reason its easily one of my favourite freeware games of all time.

In fact I find *Spelunky* infinitely more enjoyable than *Empire: Total War*, a game which perplexes and confounds me at every possible juncture. Play it now, play it, play it, play it.

VERDICT Play it



FAR CRY 2

Playing with fire: **Laurence Elliott**

LOVED BY SOME, hated by others, *Far Cry 2* is one of the most divisive games that's been released in the last few years. I decided to give it a whirl and decide for myself, since I had just finished building a rather pricey new

machine and wanted to flex its muscles. And boy, did it flex them!

The first thing to notice when playing it is how utterly jaw-dropping the game looks when the graphics are set to the near-unattainable Ultra

setting. Except for *Crysis*, it's the most visually stunning PC title ever made. From the dense and steamy jungles, to the sun-battered and wind-swept deserts, the detailed environments were a joy to explore and fight on.

Understandably however, it had various criticisms thrown at it. Repetitiveness, strange NPC behaviour and the lack of a substantial narrative, to name but a few. Most of these I could forgive until I got 88% of the way through and couldn't progress any further, essentially ending the game for me. A Google search revealed that this is a common bug that the developers have so far ignored. Brilliant. Good job Ubisoft. Fancy giving me my £20 back?

That being said, I still find myself no closer to deciding which side of the argument I fall down on. There's certainly a lot to love with *Far Cry 2*, but those feelings are tempered throughout by annoying little niggles that never leave the back of your mind, ultimately shattering the near-perfect illusion that Ubisoft worked so hard to build.

This was both one of the best, and most disappointing, games of 2008.

VERDICT Bittersweet symphony

Savannah hell of a time.



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

TITAN QUEST

"I am now playing, no, enjoying *Titan Quest*, its stunning visuals combined with its genius of RPG goodness, keeps me coming back for more, the most re-installed game I have from Steam."

Mad_AI

THE GRAVEYARD

"The sound, the graphics! The exploration and music! The grayscale colour scheme! It's like a game made out of my dreams."

apophis_dd

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

"*FM2009* doesn't seem right. Buggy as hell. The magic is gone."

alberthammond



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

David Brown goes on a stabbing frenzy with Samuel Ranta-Eskola from Starbreeze

ONE OF LIFE'S mysteries is that some things can be universally described as fantastic, yet it turns out nobody has ever bothered to buy, listen, watch or play them. *Escape From Butcher Bay* falls into this category.

You talk to most PC games enthusiasts and they'll go "Yeah, *Butcher Bay*, I keep meaning to play that." Well, now that its follow-up, *Assault on Dark Athena*, has come out, complete

with revamped *Butcher-y* goodness, there's far less excuse for all you people out there who haven't taken the plunge to avoid it.

David Brown spoke to Samuel Ranta-Eskola of developers Starbreeze to find out about what was in, what was out and whether we'll be seeing jet-packs in future *Riddick* games.



Samuel Ranta-Eskola
Producer, Starbreeze



Riddick catches some rays.

01 DIESEL POWERED

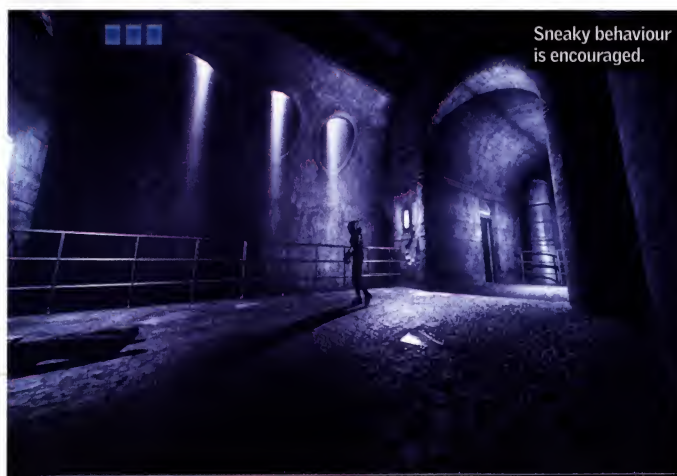
"Vin Diesel was a lot more hands on when we did *Butcher Bay*, in terms of project reviews, the direction we were heading in and so on. His company, Tigon Studios, is headed up by Ian Stephens, who's a former Starbreeze employee, so we have really good connections there. He was actually part of this project before he started with Tigon, so he's got very good insight into where we are heading and everything.

"So, Vin knows that we know the framework, but he has his favourite writers who have helped to refine the dialogue and make some final touches on the script. Vin has been involved all through the project, even though we communicate straight through Ian.

"This time out, Vin hasn't done the motion-capture work or things like that, as we used a stunt actor for this, but he has of course done the voice recording."

02 SEQUEL-ITIS

"Making a direct sequel to *Escape From Butcher Bay* was definitely on the table to start off with. When we started off this project, we had some discussions on where we should go with this one and there was a question, a concept about making a sequel type of game. This would almost certainly have been different from *Dark Athena*, though that doesn't mean it would have become a better game, of course. The first direction we were given was to make more out of *Butcher Bay* and then add some content, and this is what became the embryo for *Dark Athena*."



Sneaky behaviour is encouraged.

03 CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

"There were lots of things in the sequel design that didn't make it into *Dark Athena*, but then again they're two completely different games. One of the ideas was to have jetpacks that you fly around in and stuff like that. During the course of making a game, there's always lots of stuff that doesn't make it, that would take a lot of work but wouldn't provide the value that we needed, so you do a lot of cutting. But yeah, the jetpack was one thing we came close to putting into *Dark Athena*. We had a good concept for them, actually. You were supposed to fly around in first-person view and see your handles, steering them in first person. It would have been awesome, we think."



Some enemies attack you with interpretive dance.

"During the course of making a game, there's always lots of stuff that doesn't make it"



This guy enjoys having his head smashed in.

04 PLANETSIDE PROBLEMS

"The planet parts were the second extension of the game, and we've realised there are some things we would have liked to improve, like adding a hub, where you could meet and talk to some civilians, do some side missions and fighting there. There wasn't really time to do that, but I still think the planet bits were really fun. We believe that, when you release a game, you have at least 300-400 items you want to fix in the game."

"It's a bit different from the ship parts, so it feels like a second act, but yeah, we could have done a lot more there. After you get the SCARR gun we probably should have had more elements of stealth, but, well, lesson learned and all that. Having said this, I wouldn't say we were dissatisfied with the planet, as there are a lot of interesting moments there."



"Shit - I dropped my keys in this."

06 SCARR TISSUE

"The SCARR gun, actually, has a lot of tactical elements to it that most players will miss out on, because people tend to use it only because it has unlimited ammo and everything. The thing is, it's a weapon that gives the player a huge disadvantage in most firefights, so you should switch to hand-to-hand weapons if you get to close range, for example. I think most people will find it annoying because they die because they're not changing weapons, but if you use it tactically, it is going to be a lot different. We did a lot of testing with that and the spider drones.

"We think they are going to be one of those things that people vary in their reaction to them, but the reason they are there on the planet is to force players to sneak around a bit, to be more careful. You have to be a bit more tactical, which replaces the stealth element."



Pleading for your life with Riddick is a bad move.

05 ACTION HERO

"The way we set up the *Dark Athena* project was that maybe it would be a short expansion, three to four hours to expand the gameplay. Originally, we were looking to focus more on the action segment, but as we proceeded to make the game, we realised, yeah, the stealth element was a bit lacking in some ways, so we added two levels where we focused more on exploration and stealth.

"One of them is the first level on the planet, where you use the stealthy approach far more, before moving onto the action later. So yeah, it was a bit of a conscious decision there. We decided that we wanted more action, but, that being said, the planet also grew in size. It started out being three levels, but it grew to seven levels in the end."

The popular Ulaks don't work on every enemy.

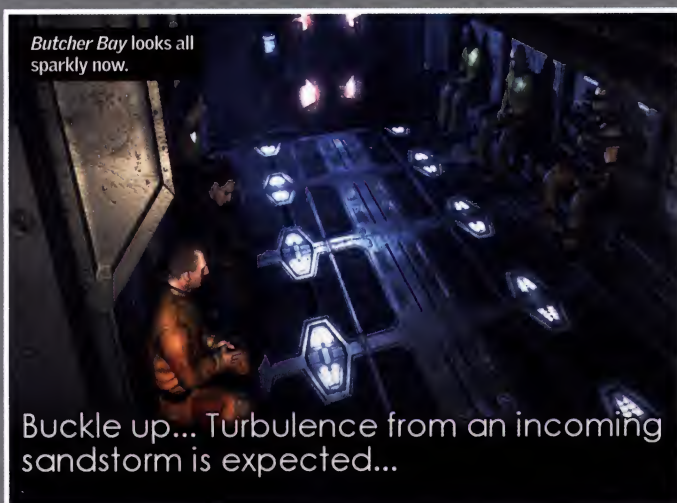


07 KILLING FIELDS

"We've a few variations of killing animation in there. With all the weapons included, there are probably 40 or 50 different finishing and counter-moves. Probably closer to 80 if you do all the animations for all the different weapons. I can't recall how many we scrapped, but there were probably a few that we just couldn't get to work, so let's say we cut 10 to 15 of them. But yeah, the bulk of them are in the game. My favourite one is probably where you have the Ulaks, and you totally go berserk, stabbing and stabbing for like two or three seconds. That one is gruesome, but initially we had a problem with that animation being so long, so we had to pause the AI while you do it, so you don't get killed while stuck in a stabbing frenzy. The hairpin through the eye is also a pretty nasty one.

"The Ulaks are the signature weapons for Riddick so they were always going to be the ones players used the most, but there are definite tactical advantages with the other weapons in certain situations. The animations are a different speed and also you can do more damage with the club, which is useful against harder opponents like Iron Lord. The knife is also very good against him too, using the hit-and-run strategy - get in close, stab him then back off."

Butcher Bay looks all sparkly now.



Buckle up... Turbulence from an incoming sandstorm is expected...

08 BACK TO THE BAY

"*Butcher Bay*, back in 2004, was one of the best-looking games around, and we were very pleased to get lots of positive comments from critics and fans. But when you remember a game from five or six years ago you idolise it and see it through rose-tinted spectacles. If you go back today, it doesn't look good. A couple of years have gone by and even though it was a good-looking game then, now it doesn't really match up. So, we've gone through all the textures, improving their resolution, reworking floors and everything to make them more visually appealing, and we've worked on the audio.

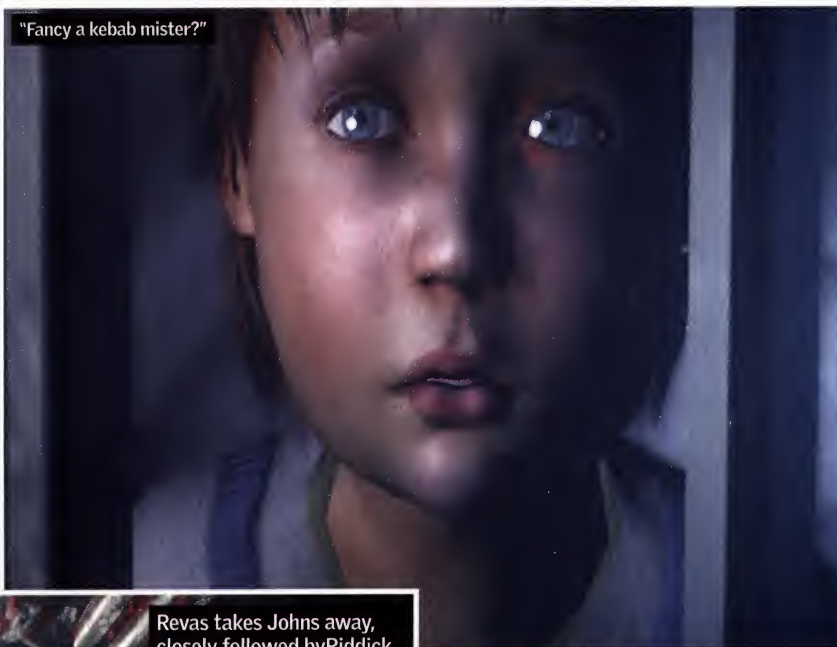
"If you look at the games side-by-side, there are clear improvements. Veterans of the game will instantly notice it's a lot better. We've had five years of engine, AI, gameplay and finishing moves improvements, all of which have been incorporated into *Butcher Bay*. We've also fixed a few quirks noticed by the community, like it was very hard to find your way through the mines, so we did some restructuring with the level design to fix that, plus fixing some problems with a few quests."

09 CHARACTER STUDY

"Personally, I loved Exbob and his animations. The guy who played him had a lot of freedom to do his interpretation of a crazy madman, so most of the dialogue is basically from him. He just stood there for a couple of hours coming up with these crazy movements, it is so hilarious to watch him do that when you see the reference movies we have internally. I think he came out really well in the game as well. As for the major characters, I'd probably stick with Dacher. Of course, Lance Henriksen is brilliant – he gave such a good performance – and Jaylor as well, he's really good. Senate is an interesting character too, the guy doing that was actually in *Butcher Bay* as well, if I'm not mistaken. He's a classically-trained actor with a Shakespearean background."

"Lance Henriksen is brilliant – he gave such a good performance"

"Fancy a kebab mister?"



Revas takes Johns away, closely followed by Riddick.



10 BEST OF THE BEST

"I liked the variation, although yeah, I loved the cell decks. The performances we got from the actors was great. I also liked the introduction of the first Alpha drone, when he comes out of the bazaar, when he comes crushing out the door.

"The first all-out action level is good, and the level where you start on the drone track and you drop down in darkness, before taking out some doctors, fighting the Revas-controlled drones and then the mech. It is a hard one, but I liked it, has a lot of variation. It'll take a while for most players to figure out what to do, but we tried it in testing and, of course, people died there, but we think it works like that." **PCZ**

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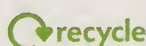
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10 JUNE

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MODERN WARFARE 2

Infinity Ward return to Call of Duty 4.
We get the first look at the new instalment and chat to the dev team!

ELVES ON PARADE

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Discover the latest on BioWare's epic fantasy game!



SOLDIERS ON TEST

ARMA II

ATTEEEENNNSHUN! Will Bohemia Interactive deliver the goods?

MASSIVE REVIEWS!

ANNO 1404 GHOSTBUSTERS
OVERLORD II PROTOTYPE
TERMINATOR SALVATION
CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2009
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

CREATURE FEATURE

SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES

Find out what's happening next with Will Wright's Spore



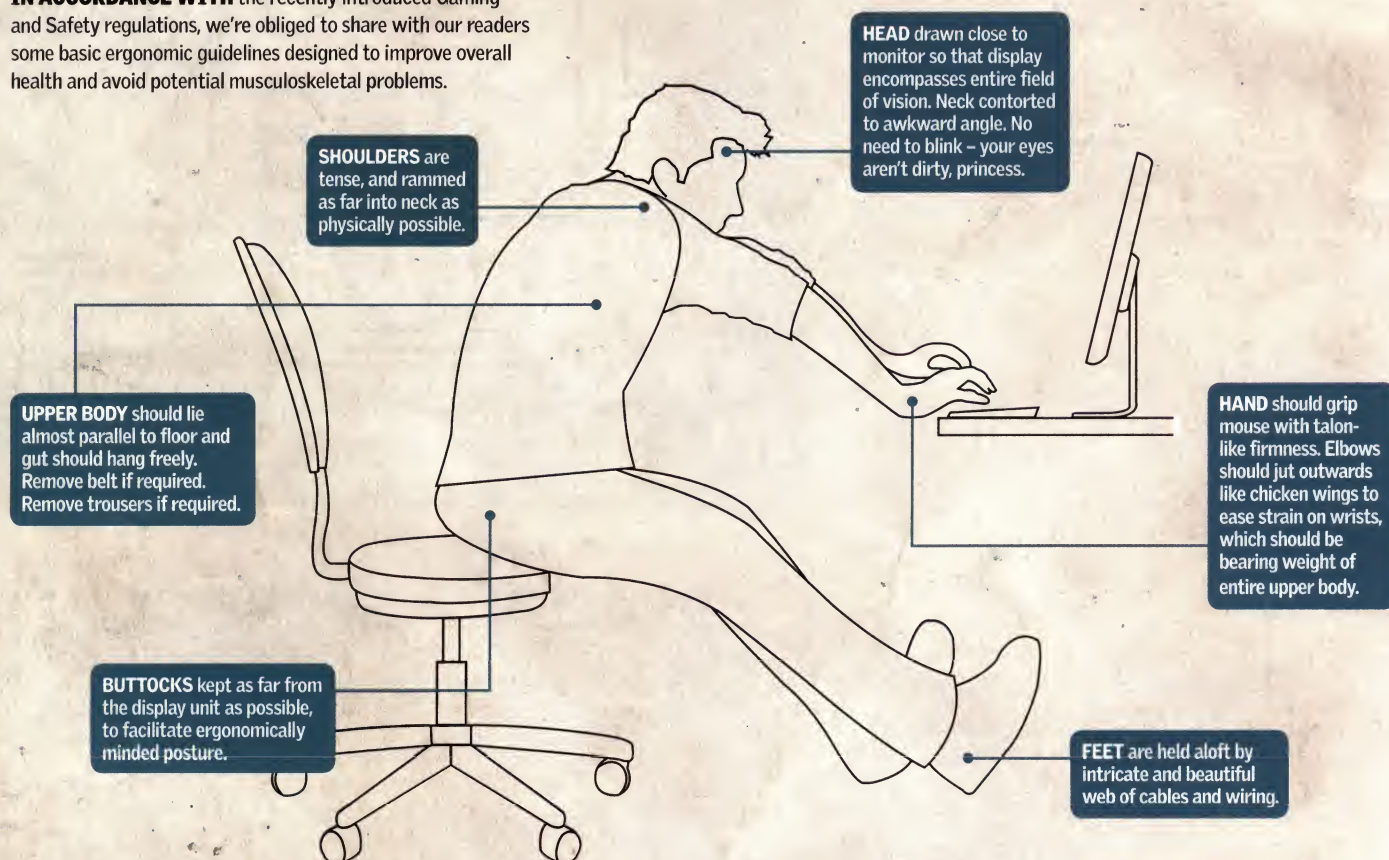
All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change
PC ZONE is a fickle mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

FOR YOUR SAFETY...

2009 NO. 2792B

British Union of Medicine's Gaming and Safety Regulations 2009

IN ACCORDANCE WITH the recently introduced Gaming and Safety regulations, we're obliged to share with our readers some basic ergonomic guidelines designed to improve overall health and avoid potential musculoskeletal problems.



TROUBLESHOOTING – YOUR HEALTH PROBLEMS SOLVED!

PROBLEM	HERE'S THE THING...	YOU SHOULD PROBABLY...
My eyes are caked/encrusted in a sort of cakey/crusty deposit, which is both painful and inconvenient.	You're sitting too far from the screen, which allows these microscopic bits of cake to reach your eyeballs.	Inch ever closer to your monitor, until the warmth of the liquid crystals makes your eyes feel all numb and cosy.
Can't seem to actually move any more.	You're paralysed.	Your muscles have atrophied. Twitch every 20 minutes or so to remind them they exist.
There's a sort of warmth emanating from my seat, and a horrible smell too.	You've shat yourself.	Stop shatting yourself.
My wrists have become soft like jelly. My hands just flop about on the ends of my arms.	You no longer have wrists.	Mourn the loss of your wrists, and ask a science teacher about abrasion.
All of my friends are taller than me now.	Your spine is four inches shorter than it was one year ago.	Get new friends.
I am bleeding out of everywhere all at once.	Oh no, you've got the dreaded Crispy Nips.	Go jogging more.



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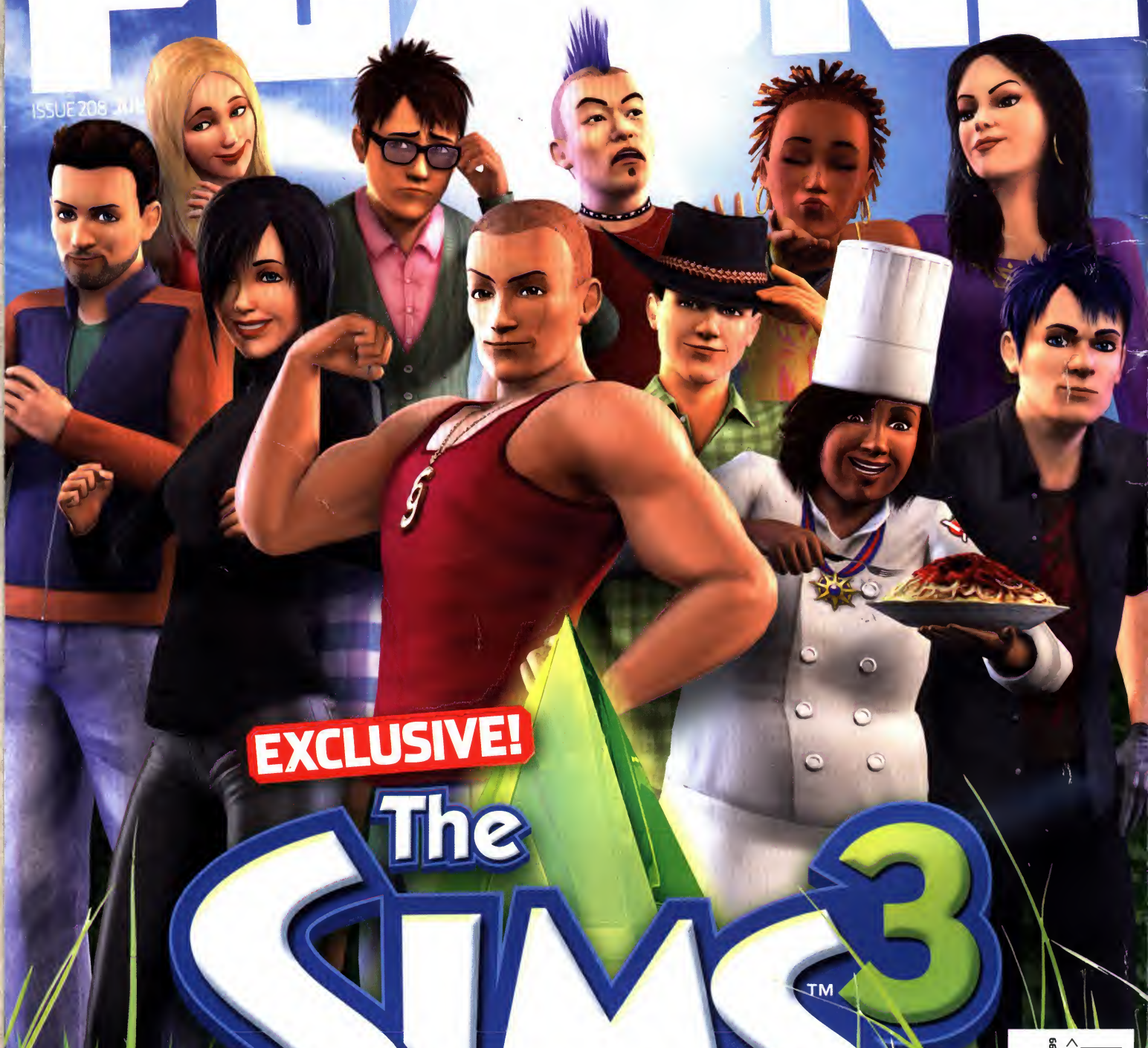


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